ADVENTURES IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

BY

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book has its origin in the instructions and blessings I received from my revered teacher, Swami Brahmananda — the spiritual son of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Wishing to see me grow along intellectual and literary lines side by side with the spiritual, the Swami greatly encouraged me in my study of religious and allied literature. Once he said: "Form your habit of study to such an extent that you will feel unhappy if any day you fail to pursue your studies." Then he explained what he meant: "The mind may not always be able to remain on the spiritual plane. In that case it may be kept occupied with higher religious thoughts, and will not be allowed to fall into a lower plane." The words of the master gave me great incentive to my studies of which I sometimes kept elaborate notes.

During the early years of my monastic life, for fear of developing a false ego, I was very reluctant to discuss religious matters with the members of the public or to write articles for our magazines, although I was directly connected with the publication of our Madras magazine, the *Vedanta Kesari,* from its very inception. One day the Swami asked me, "Why don't you talk on religious topics with the devotees?" In return I asked, "What am I to talk about?" Replied the Swami: "Why, what you are learning from us, what you are acquiring through your studies, what you are gaining through your attempts to lead the religious life—just speak of that." This advice gave me the direction to make my treatment of religious subjects as practical as possible.

On another day he asked me: "Why don't you write an article every week?" I enquired: "What shall I write? I do not have any ideas." The Swami replied: "Learn to think deeply. Then the ideas will rush so much that it will be a problem for you to regulate the current." What the Guru had predicted proved to be literally true. Through his grace I have never fallen short of ideas in the course of my speaking or writing.

Later on, at the command of the Swami, I served for three years as the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata,* our magazine now published from Calcutta, and also some years after, as the editor of the *Vedanta Kesari,* along with my duties as the President of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. I thus got the opportunity of writing many articles.

But the suggestion of preparing an article every week could only be literally carried out during the years of my service as the leader of the Vedanta Centre, Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A., between 1942 and 1949. I used to prepare elaborate notes for my Sunday talks many of which were preserved in disc-records and later on transcribed. This was also repeated years after at Bangalore since October, 1951.

The chapters of the present volume are originally lectures delivered in Philadelphia and Bangalore, all of which were published in the *Vedanta and the West,* the *Prabuddha Bharata,* the *Vedanta Kesari* and the *Vedanta for East and West.** I am most thankful to the authorities

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of these magazines for their generous permission to publish these articles in book form.

I also heartily thank the many authors and publishers of several books, too numerous to mention, who have helped me in the preparation of the lectures, and from which I have quoted many apt passages. In spite of my best efforts I have not been able to trace the sources of some of the passages quoted by me. I must mention here that I have taken the liberty of abridging and adapting some of these for the sake of convenience. In translating some of the Sanskrit and other passages I have followed the free and interpretative method, thereby avoiding too many explanations and probably making the reading as painless as possible.

In the preparation of the book I have received the hearty co-operation of many of my friends, students and

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co-workers whose number is too large for individual mention. I therefore take this opportunity of offering them all my most grateful thanks collectively.

This book is humbly dedicated to the Universal Spirit dwelling in all beings and particularly manifest in the hearts of sincere spiritual seekers. I wish and pray that this co-operative labour of love may prove to be beneficial to many spiritual seekers in their religious adventures. May it awaken their interest in their spiritual ideal, help them in their spiritual practice and encourage them in their striving to attain the heights of spiritual realization.

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama,
Bangalore-19.
July, 1959.

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INTRODUCTION

"Know the Self to be the Master sitting in the chariot, and the body the chariot. Consider the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the reins. The senses are the horses and the sense-objects, the roads. He who is always of restrained mind and possesses right understanding has his senses controlled like the good horses of a charioteer. He, who has wisdom for his charioteer and the mind as the well-controlled reins, reaches the end of the spiritual journey — the realisation of the Supreme, all-pervading Spirit."

—*Katha Upanishad*
III : 3, 4, 6, 9

"With the heart concentrated by Yoga, with the eyes of evenness for all beings, the illumined Yogi beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. Being established in unity he worships the Supreme Spirit dwelling in all beings and ever abides in the highest spiritual consciousness."

—*Bhagavad Gita*
VI : 29 and 31.

The Religious Attitude

While the out and out materialist looks upon man as a body — a combination of cells — and the psychologist as an integrated body-mind, the spiritually illumined regards man in his essential nature as a soul having the mind and body as its coverings or instruments. Material life is, therefore, concerned primarily with the well-being of the body. Mental life is occupied with the welfare of both the body and the mind. Spiritual life on the other hand takes into account all the three factors, the soul, the mind and the body, and aims at the harmonious development of the body and the mind so that the soul may be able to unfold its potential divinity spontaneously. The instruments of the mind and the body must be made healthy and vigorous so that the soul may function through them freely and joyfully. That is why we find the ancient Vedic Rishis praying: "May my limbs, speech, breath, eye, ear and also my strength and all my senses become refreshed and vigorous. . .May I who am devoted to the Atman be endowed with all the virtues extolled in the Upanishads."[1]

The Task of the Adventurers

In all forms of adventures the adventurer somehow feels the existence of an unknown infinite region and wishes to discover it. As Thomas Gray, the English poet, has said,

"Some bold adventurers disdain
The limits of their reign,
And unknown regions dare decry."[2]

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1. *The Universal Prayers*—Swami Yatiswarananda. p. 49.
2. "Ode on a distant prospect of Eton College".

The scientific explorer is attempting to come in touch with new regions in the world of matter. The psychologist is trying to probe into unexplored regions of the mind, subconscious and unconscious. The para-psychologist with the help of extra-sensory perception is discovering the "new world of the mind", and is demonstrating how "the mind can in some way transcend barriers of time and acquire impressions of events to come." He is proving how "a direct mind to mind contact is possible in the case of persons living far distant from one another", thereby widening the frontiers of the mind and revealing the power of the mind to reach new regions transcending the domain and laws of matter. The spiritual seeker is eager to come directly — intuitively — in touch with the infinite Spirit, which like the Infinite light interpenetrates and permeates not only his own soul but all souls. In the course of his search for his own Atman, the individual soul comes to discover the glory of Paramatman — the Infinite Spirit which is called by various appellations, Brahman, God, Jehova, Allah, Tao, Truth and so on.

The Upanishadic seer advises:

"Abandoning vain talks know the Supreme Atman, the Self by whom heaven, earth and sky, the mind and the vital powers are permeated. This is the way to attain immortality — the eternal life."[3]

The Religious Adventurer

The religious adventurer has been likened to a diver. Sri Ramakrishna used to sing a Vaishnava song:

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3. *Mundaka Upanishad.* II.2.5.

"Dive deep, O mind,
Dive deep in the Ocean of God's beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love."[4]

It is the pearl of divine Love that makes the spiritual seeker richer in spirit and happier in life.

Certainly, as Mr. Browning says, there are

"Two points in the adventure of the diver,
One — when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One — when, a prince, he rises with his pearl."[5]

What the poet says of the ocean diver is also true of all divers, and particularly so of spiritual divers, who fathom the depths of the Infinite Spirit and become enriched in spiritual knowledge.

The religious adventurer has also been likened to an explorer who wishes to reach the heights of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Like the mountaineer, the spiritual seeker, eager to attain the heights of transcendental consciousness, trains his body and nerves, lungs and muscles and also his entire mind with his thinking, feeling and willing. He starts his journey, as it were, conquering the ground under his feet step by step until he reaches the highest peak and is lost in its glory. Speaking of the Vedantic explorer, Prof. Max Muller observes:

"I am myself not a mountaineer, nor am I altogether a Vedantist, but if I can admire the bold climbers scaling Mount Gouri-Sankar, I can also admire the bold thinkers

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. p. 83.
5. "Paracelsus".

toiling up to the heights of the Vedanta where they seem lost to us in clouds and sky."[6]

Man's Attitude towards God — the Ultimate Reality

There are various attitudes entertained by the religious seekers towards God. "O Lord, while I identify myself with the body I am your servant. When I consider myself as an individual soul I am your part. And when I look upon myself as the Spirit I am one with yourself — the Supreme Spirit."[7]

The body-conscious dualist considers God a person separate from himself and comes to entertain a personal relationship with Him — as a servant, a child, a friend or a lover. To the distressed He is the remover of misery, to the frustrated the fulfiller of wishes, to the enquirer the goal of his quest. The idea of God is coloured by the attitude of the aspirant.

The well-known psychologist, Professor Gorden Allport, who recognises the value of religion, remarks: "It is unnecessary to exhaust the list of contributing desires. Their multiplicity is indicated by the varying conceptions of Deity held by different individuals and by one and the same individual at different periods of time. When we need affection, God is love; knowledge, He is omniscient; consolation, He granteth peace that passeth understanding. When we have sinned, He is the Redeemer; when we need guidance, the Holy Spirit. Divine attributes plainly conform

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6. *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* — Prof. Max Muller. p. 184.
7. *The Universal Prayers.* p. 238.

to the panorama of desire, although the individual is seldom aware that his approach to his deity is determined by his present needs."[8]

God is not a Projection of the Mind

If our conceptions of God are coloured by our own emotions, does this imply that God Himself is a projection of the mind? An emphatic 'no' is the reply given by the enlightened teachers of religion. Being perfectly clear on the point, the seers of the Upanishad declare from their own experience: "I have known the Infinite Being, which is effulgent and beyond all darkness; knowing Him alone can one be saved from death. There is no other way to immortality."[9] "He is unseen but seeing, unheard of but hearing, unperceived but perceiving, unknown but knowing. There is no other seer but He. There is no other hearer but He, there is no other knower but He. That is Self."[10]

The ultimate Truth is beyond all thought and speech and is one without a second but sages think of It in various ways and call It by various names.

The Reality and Opinions about it

The rational mystic philosophers of Vedanta draw a distinction between Tattvam — the Reality, and Matam — opinions about the Reality. The Reality is one but opinions about it are many, although they point to the same Reality.

"Devotees follow different paths, straight or crooked, according to their different tendencies. Yet, O Lord, You

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8. *Individual and His Religion*. pp. 10 & 11.
9. *The Svetasvatara Upanishad*. III. 8.
10. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. III. 7. 23.

alone are the ultimate goal of all men, as is the ocean to all rivers."[11]

It has been well said that it is the coloured glasses in the mind that colour our opinions. In all spiritual paths the seekers are asked to undergo strict practices and disciplines which remove the taints of desires and passions, and help in the unfoldment of the power of perceiving the Truth more and more clearly and directly.

The trouble with most spiritual seekers is that they want to cling to their own personality and the forms of their deities and also the personal relationship with them in some aspect or other. However, with the unfolding of greater and greater insight, the spiritual seekers come to rise above personal relations and realise that essentially they are souls and the deity they worship is none other than the Supreme Spirit. Then they further feel that they are inseparably connected with Him as parts to the whole, as qualities to the substance, as rays to the Infinite Light.

There is even a higher state in which the aspirants recognise that the individual and the cosmic are the two-fold manifestation of the Supreme Spirit which is One, but appears as the many. For some reason or other the Vedanta has come to be identified with Advaita in the West. But in the all-comprehensive system of Vedanta, all the three stages — dualism, qualified non-dualism and non-dualism — are like three rungs in the ladder of spiritual experience leading to the transcendental state of consciousness which is beyond Dvaita and Advaita.

Answering the stock arguments of superficial critics, Prof. Max Muller reveals the true significance of Advaita or

11. *Sivamahimnah Stotra*, 7.

non-dualism beyond time, space and causation: "That is the feeling which I cannot resist in examining the ancient Vedanta. Other philosophers have denied the reality of the world as perceived by us, but no one has ventured to deny at the same time the reality of what we call the ego, the senses and the mind and their inherent forms. And yet after lifting the Self above body and soul, after uniting heaven and earth, God and man, Brahman and Atman, these Vedanta philosophers have destroyed nothing in the life of the phenomenal beings who have to act and to fulfil their duties in this phenomenal world. On the contrary, they have shown that there can be nothing phenomenal without something that is real, and that goodness and virtue, faith and works, are necessary as a preparation, nay as a *sine qua non,* for the attainment of that highest knowledge which brings the soul back to its source and to its home, and restores it to its true nature, to its Selfhood in Brahman."[12]

Nearer to God and Man

All forms of real religious experience bring the seeker nearer both to God and man. If he is a dualist who believes that God is separate from all souls, and experiences a living relation to God, as a servant to the master, child to father or mother, he naturally comes to look upon all souls as fellow servants or fellow children of the same Deity. The seeker who rises above body consciousness and is able to feel that he is a soul, and God — the Whole — is the Soul of all souls, spontaneously looks upon all beings as fellow souls united in the one Godhead. When the advanced aspirant who has succeeded in

12. *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*. p. 183.

discovering that he is a spiritual being, distinct from the ego, mind, senses and body, proceeds with the help of his inner vision farther and farther in his search for the Reality, he comes to realise that his real being and the real being of all is no other than One Infinite Spirit which appears as the many souls without losing its essential nature. He then understands that he had been meditating on this Infinite Being as the whole and himself as a part, he had been worshipping the same Supreme Spirit as master, father, mother or beloved. He, therefore, experiences the shallowness of the critic who says that "God is at bottom nothing but an exalted father."[13] He realises that the spiritual relation between the soul and God is not a glorified imitation of the earthly relation but, in fact, it is really the archetype of which the human relationship is but a faint copy. Even those who worship God in a personal aspect know in their heart of hearts that He is much more than that. That is why we find the worshipper addressing the Deity in the words: "Thou art my mother, Thou art my father, Thou art my friend, Thou art my comrade, Thou art my knowledge, Thou art my wealth, Thou art my all-in-all, O God of Gods." He now knows fully that instead of God being "modelled after the father,"[14] the human father is modelled after God, the Divine Father, and the earthly relation is at its best a shadowy semblance of the eternal spiritual relation existing between the eternal soul and the eternal God.

As a matter of fact the illumined soul discovers that it is God who is Infinite Love and is the fountain-source of

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13. Sigmund Freud. Quoted by Gordon W. Allport in *Individual and His Religion*, p. 8.
14. *Ibid.*

all loves. Only a drop of this love comes to the earthly father, mother and other relations. There comes a time when the spiritual seekers, no longer satisfied with this mere drop of earthly love, turn to the infinite divine source itself. And having realised the Infinite and having their hearts filled with infinite love, they share it with their fellow beings.

Thus true spiritual experience awakens real love for God and also for man. The illumined soul comes to give each individual a spiritual dignity not only as a soul but considers him as one like himself, eternally connected with the same Divine Spirit who is manifest in all beings and dwells in them.

Why should one love one's neighbour

According to the systems of Vedanta the neighbour is not only a neighbour, but also a fellow servant, a spiritual brother or sister, nay a fellow soul or as Sri Krishna says —"an eternal portion of the same Supreme Spirit."

The illumined soul who has realised the unity of all beings in the Universal Self, comes, to recognise a spiritual identity with all beings and their welfare. Prof. Paul Deussen, the illustrious Vedantic scholar of Germany, observes: "The great formula Tat Tvam Asi — Thou Art That — gives in three words metaphysics and morals all together. You shall love your neighbour as yourselves, because you are your own neighbour and mere illusion makes you believe that your neighbour is something different from yourselves."[15]— A thoughtful Western writer points out very aptly, "Here we have deeply laid the metaphysical

15. *Elements of Metaphysics*, p. 336.

foundation of the duty of loving our neighbour and acting towards him as though he was our Self. 'Thou Art That' — that is to say, there is a deeper inclusive Self in which you and he are one; and loving service is the note or sign of this practical identity."[16]

The Universal Ideal of Spiritualised Service

Very often the so-called social service undertaken by religious bodies has become too much tainted by the unbecoming policy of bringing the persons so served within the fold of the particular religions or denominations. This sectarian motive is against the spirit of Vedanta.

It is an insult to regard the neighbcur as a prospective convert. He is to be given a spiritual dignity which is his birthright and is to be served in a spirit of worship. Sri Ramakishna proclaimed this ideal when referring to the instruction of showing compassion to all living creatures. He observed: "Talk of compassion for beings! Will you animalcule, bestow compassion on beings? You wretch, who are you to bestow it? No, no; not compassion to Jivas but service to them as Siva."[17]

Following in the footsteps of his master, Swami Vivekananda proclaimed this ideal — service to man is service to God in man; "You have read 'look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God', but I say — the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted — let these be your God. The service to these alone is the higher religion."[18] "For us, it is not to pity but to serve. Ours

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16. *The Faith of the Future* — James Henry Tuckwell. p.185.
17. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* — Swami Saradananda. p. 821.
18. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 173.

is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of Self in all."[19] Speaking of himself the Swami said: "I have lost all wish for my salvation."[20]

However, finding that few people have the strength to give up their love for salvation, the Swami combined the ideal of salvation with that of service. "Liberation is only for him who gives up everything for others, whereas others who tax their brains day and night harping on 'my salvation, my salvation', wander about with their true well-being ruined, both present and prospective . . . It is only by doing good to others that one attains to his own good, and it is by leading others to Bhakti (devotion) and Mukti (salvation) that one attains them himself."[21] He has placed 'before us and the world the twofold ideal in a nutshell: *ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*' — "To work for one's own salvation and for the good of the world."

This is a world-ideal which, without distinction of race, nationality and religion, all of us should try to practise and realise. And this we should do in order to bring harmony and peace to our own souls and to our divided human family. Humanity is God embodied and must realise its divine nature and heritage.

"May the world attain peace, may all beings be freed from dangers, may all beings realise what is good, may all beings be actuated by noble thoughts, may all beings be happy everywhere."

Om Santḥi Santḥi Santḥi.
Om Peace Peace Peace.

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19. *Ibid.* 395.
20. *Ibid.* 399.
21. *Ibid.* 384 & 246.

"What is that by which all else is known?

"Those who know Brahman say that there are two kinds of knowledge, the higher and the lower. The lower is knowledge of the Vedas and also of phonetics, ceremonials, grammar, etymology, metre and astronomy. The higher knowledge is that by which one knows the Changeless Reality. By this is fully revealed to the wise That which transcends the senses, which is uncaused, which is undefinable, which has neither eyes nor ears, neither hands nor feet, which is all-pervading, subtler than the subtlest— the everlasting, the source of all."

—Mundaka Upanishad.

"The Self is to be known. Hear about It, reflect upon It, meditate upon It. By knowing the Self, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, one comes to know all things as nothing else but the Self."

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

CHAPTER I

HARMONY AND UNIVERSALISM IN TRUE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Can Religion bring Harmony

Has religion any chance of bringing harmony to a world in which, it is said, we have enough religion to hate and exploit one another but not enough to love and serve one another?

As university students, many of us were sceptical about religion, seeing the meaningless quarrels and theological warfare between the Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions and between the various denominations. Some of us doubted the presence of God in what were called the houses of God, and felt no interest in them, like the small boy of the story whose mother was rebuking him for not going to church willingly: "You go to the movies for entertainment, and you go down to Freddie's house, and over to Tommie's house and have a nice time. Now, don't you think it is only right that once a week you should go to God's House, just for one hour?" The boy replied: "But, Mummy, what would you think if you were invited to somebody's house and every time you went, the fellow was not there?"

We were becoming sceptical about the utility of religious worship though we did not think that religion was "the opiate of the people". We felt within us a deep longing for the Truth but did not know how this longing

could be satisfied. At such a transitional period of our lives, through good luck or divine grace, we came in touch with several of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. All of them possessed a remarkable broad-mindedness, intensity and extensity in religious life happily combined. They looked upon all religions as paths leading to the same Godhead and taught us that the followers of the different religions are not enemies but fellow-seekers after Truth, and are to be served as much as possible. Their Master Sri Ramakrishna's life itself was a veritable parliament of religions. He had realised that although the paths are different, there is only one God towards whom all are travelling.

The Unique Universalism of India

It was not an accident that Sri Ramakrishna, the latest world-prophet, was born in India. Religion has ever been the central theme, the key-note of Indian life—individual and collective. In spite of an amount of narrowness, there has existed in India a great universal spirit, a unique freedom of thought in the field of religion, the like of which does not exist in any other part of the world. As late as the end of the last century, Robert Ingersoll—the famous agnostic orator of America—told Swami Vivekananda, who had gone to America to spread the message of Vedanta:

> "Forty years ago you would have been hanged if you had come to preach in this country, or you would have been burnt alive. You would have been stoned out of the villages if you had come even much later."[1]

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1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern & Western Disciples, p. 327. (For the edition and publishers of this book and the subsequent ones referred to, please see the Bibliography.)

In the West, if any one declares that only the Christians shall be saved while others shall suffer eternal punishment, he may be called a good Christian. On the other hand, in India, if a Hindu should think in such a narrow way, he would, as a rule, be called a bad Hindu.

In ancient India there was a school of materialists of the extreme type. Even they were left free to propagate their opinions though very few were influenced by them. Among the orthodox schools of philosophy themselves, there are some in which God as Creator does not find a place. As Mahatma Gandhi once said: "A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu."[2]

The Refuge for Victims of Religious Persecution

True to her universalism, India gave shelter to the Jews when their temple was shattered by Roman tyranny and they came seeking refuge. Hindu kings gave them a charter granting freedom of worship.

When the Persian emperors started persecuting the Christians, a large body of them came with their bishops and clergy and were given shelter by the tolerant Hindu princes in the South. Old copper plates indicate that the Christians were granted freedom of worship and even the privileges of the highest caste. The first Christian church in the Hindu state of Travancore was built through the generosity of the Hindu king.

Later, when Persia itself was invaded by Mohammedans, and millions of Parsis were converted by force and persuasion, a large number of them fled to India seeking

2. *Young India*, 24th April, 1924.

refuge. They too were received with great consideration by the Hindu kings who helped them to build their first fire-temple in India. India, and not Persia, has thus become the home of the Zoroastrians and their ancient religion.

Religious Harmony—the Key-note

Religious harmony has been, in the main, the central theme of the Eternal Religion of India, even though some fanatics have at times raised discordant notes.

The earliest of the world's scriptures, the Rig Veda, contains the greatest declaration of religious harmony: "Truth is one, but sages call it by various names."[3]

The Bhagavad Gita contains the teachings of Sri Krishna, the great harmoniser, who gave all paths a Godward turn:

> "In whatever way men approach Me, the Supreme Spirit, even so do I accept them. Whatever path they choose leads to Me alone."[4]

Buddhism was an attempt to reform Hinduism at a time when it had become degenerate, but it was never spread by fire and sword as was greatly done later in the case of Christianity and Islam. The Buddha's message of enlightenment penetrated everywhere in a peaceful way. King Asoka, who was a staunch follower of Buddhism, put up the edict:

> "He who out of respect for his own faith disparages the faiths of others inflicts the greatest injury on his own."

The spirit of dynamic universalism enabled Hinduism to assimilate within its fold a number of races—native and foreign—with their variety of customs and cultures.

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3. *Rig Veda*, I : 164 : 46.
4. *Bhagavad Gita*, IV. 11.

The Impact of Christianity

In the early centuries of the Christian era, many Christians came to India as refugees, but later many came as conquerors and, in trying to convert others to their faith, sometimes used force and various unfair means. Many missionaries supported by the foreign rulers, grossly misused India's hospitality and vilified the Hindus who were tolerant to a fault. The Indian atmosphere with its religious harmony, however, has been changing the attitude of some of the missionaries and their Christian followers.

At first this attitude was one of wholesale denunciation and destruction whenever possible. The Hindu religion was considered "a weltering chaos of darkness, terror and uncertainty". It was "the work of Satan". Later some of the leaders of Christian thought came to hold:

> "In her (India's) literature, philosophy, art and regulated life there is much that is worthless, much also that is distinctly unhealthy; yet the treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and beauty which they contain are too precious to be lost."[5]

The next attitude was:

> "Other religions are broken lights; Christianity is the perfect and complete light. Other religions are preparations for the reception of Christianity. Christianity is the fulfilment. Christ is the crown of Hinduism!"

A new outlook is gaining ground regarding different religions as 'legitimate', just as different types of human language are legitimate products of local conditions;

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5. *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints*, Eds. : F. Kingsbury & G. F. Phillips. Editorial preface.

but the attitude still maintains a sense of superiority. This reminds one of the Englishmen's remarks about the language of the Americans: "They speak the same language as we do, but not as well", "You speak what our cousins in America call English!" Something of this snobbishness is still there among the best of the Christian missionaries in India, but the spirit of universalism is undoubtedly at work.

Militant Islam tones down

This is also partly true of the Muslims who came as conquerors and finally settled in the land. In spite of occasional outbursts of fanaticism, the militant faith of Islam too has become somewhat toned down in India.

Hindu universalism has been working on Islam. Under its influence, the Moghul emperor Akbar attempted to lay the foundations of a new, broad and eclectic religion. He declared:

> "Each person according to his condition gives the Supreme Being a name, but in reality to name the unknowable is vain."[6]

His son Jehangir held that the science of Vedanta is the science of Sufism or the mysticism of Islam. Dara Shuko, a grandson of Jehangir, acknowledged the universal spirit of Islam and Hinduism and was instrumental in having the Upanishads translated into Persian. This was later on translated into a jargon of Latin, Greek and Persian, and drew the admiration of the German philosopher Schopenhauer, who declared:

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6. Quoted by H.G. Rawlinson in *India—A Short Cultural History*.

> "That incomparable book stirs the spirit to the very depths of the soul. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death."[7]

Muslim fanatics destroyed many Hindu and Buddhist temples and converted many persons by force, but still the Hindus, on the whole, continued to allow them and others perfect freedom of worship. In this connection, what Abdul Razak, the Persian Muslim ambassador to the Hindu Court at Calicut, South India, wrote about the middle of the 15th century, is very revealing:

> "The people (of Calicut) are infidels; consequently I consider myself in an enemy's country, as the Mohammedans consider every one who has not received the Qur'an. Yet I admit that I meet with perfect toleration and even favour; we have two mosques and are allowed to pray in public."[8]

The Muslim could not understand that the Hindu attitude is something more than that of toleration. It is the acceptance of all religions as true, of the fact that God can be realised through many paths.

Essential Unity and Harmony of the Different Religions

All Religions hold before man the ideal of perfection, which is termed variously as God, Allah, Tao, and so on. They stress moral purification and spiritual striving as the means for realising the ideal. Even a brief survey of the

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7. Quoted by Prof. Max Muller. *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 193.

8. Quoted by S. Radhakrishnan. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 312.

essential points of the various world-religions reveals this underlying unity of purpose and harmony.

Zoroaster, a great reformer of the ancient Persian religion, gave the ancient religion with many gods a monotheistic turn.

Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Being, the author of the universe and its destinies, always wills what is Good, but it is opposed by Ahriman, the evil spirit. Zoroaster believed in the ultimate triumph of Good. He stressed good thought, good speech and good deed which lead to this triumph.

Judaism believes in the worship of one God—Jehovah, who revealed His will to the prophets. He demands moral conduct from His worshippers. There is none beside Him; therefore man should keep His statutes. "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might."

Judaic mysticism holds that man—made in the image of God—has direct access to his Heavenly Father.

Christianity accepts both the Old and the New Testaments, and emphasizes the necessity of a mediator, of Christ, the Son of God. "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and all thy soul." "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

Islam is a product of many influences, including Judaism and Christianity. It is the religion of submission to God. A Muslim is one who submits to God and accepts Mohammed as the last of all prophets of God. Mohammed's living faith in God and in his own mission fired his followers with a tremendous vitality. The revelations given to Mohammed by Allah are collected in the Qur'an. "Your God is one

God. There is no God but He, the Compassionate the Merciful. . . All on the earth pass away, but the face of the Lord shall abide, resplendent with majesty and glory... Call upon your Lord with lowliness and in secret. Call on Him with fear and longing desire. Verily, the mercy of God is nigh unto the righteous."

According to the *Buddha,* who was an agnostic, Truth is the highest reality and this Truth, called Nirvana or unconditioned freedom, is to be realised by right comprehension, right speech, right conduct, right meditation, etc. "By the complete destruction of lust, hatred and delusion, devout men are no longer liable to suffering and are assured of final emancipation."

Buddhism flowed to many lands including China, where it blended with Taoism and Confucianism.

To *Lao Tse,* there is one Real Being, who is called 'Tao', but the word is a substitute for 'the name which cannot be named'. Tao is the source of all things, omnipotent through non-assertion. Tao implies also the inner order of the universe. "Alone It standeth; and It changeth not. Around It moveth; and It suffereth not. Even if one has a little knowledge, he can walk in the ways of the Great Supreme."

Confucius, the great humanist, based his humanism on moral life and conduct. He declared: "The higher type of man makes a sense of duty the ground-work of his character, blends with it in action the sense of harmonious proportion, manifests it in a sense of unselfishness, perfects it by the addition of sincerity and truth. . . When offered an opportunity of gain he thinks only of his duty."

What is called *Hinduism* is confederacy of faiths, a commonwealth of religions. All schools of Hinduism

believe, in some form or other, in the Atman, potential divinity of man, in Brahman or the Supreme Spirit, in the ideal of Self-realisation and in the paths of Yoga leading to direct spiritual experience.

Hinduism holds that all religions are paths to the Eternal Truth; all souls will attain salvation in due course; world brotherhood can be based only upon the Divine Principle but not upon any personality. The ideal is not toleration but acceptance of all paths as true.

"He, the eternal among non-eternals, the intelligence of the intelligent, who, though One, fulfils the desires of the many—those wise ones who perceive Him as existing within their own soul, to them belongs eternal peace, and to none else."

For reviving our spiritual life, we must stress the central theme of the religions. We need the ideal of Self-realisation. And along with that, we also need all that is great and good in each religion. By combining the noble elements of all religions we must learn how to make our life richer and fuller.

Experience Unites — Dogma Divides

The life and teachings of the illumined souls of all religions point the way to the Supreme. There is no dearth of spiritual and moral ideals in the religions of the world. The trouble is that we, the followers, do not care to live up to the ideals. While we use the names of great teachers, we reject their teachings. If they re-visit the world, they will certainly not be pleased with what we are doing. This recalls a story about the great Italian painter, Raphael. While he was engaged in painting his celebrated frescoes in Rome, he was visited by two cardinals who began to

criticise his work and find fault with it without understanding it. "The Apostle Paul has too red a face," said one. The angry artist retorted: "Yes, he blushes to see into whose hands the Church has fallen." This is true of all religions which seem to have moved away from their original teachings.

The essence of all religions as reflected in the lives of their great mystics and prophets is the same, always leading the sincere followers towards purity, strength and harmony. It is the later accretion of creed and dogma introduced by selfish and ignorant priests that has produced discord. The religion of dogma divides; the religion of experience unites. Spiritual streams have been polluted by the selfishness of those who profess to follow religion and protect it.

Phases in Religious History

In the history of religions, we see five phases:

(1) *Destruction and denunciation:* One thinks that one's own religion is the only true and good one: others are false and wicked, and are to be destroyed by all means.

(2) *Syncretism*: Men of different religious beliefs dwell together in a spirit of live and let live, stressing more their common points than their differences.

(3) *Eclecticism:* An attempt is made to incorporate what are considered the good points of other religions along with one's own, rejecting what is considered bad.

(4) *Toleration:* While one holds that one's own religion is, of course, the best and truest, one does not condemn others but merely tolerates them.

(5) *Acceptance:* In this there is no negative attitude at all. All religions are heartily accepted and respected as equally true paths leading to the same goal.

Attitude of Acceptance voiced by Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi gave expression to this attitude of acceptance, which is the spirit of Hinduism, when he observed:

> "I believe in the Bible as I believe in the Gita. I regard all the great faiths of the world as equally true with my own." "I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave."[9]

In another connection he said:

> "If in my innermost heart I have the suspicion that my own religion is the truest, and that other religions are less true, then, although I may have a certain kind of fellowship with the others, it is an extremely different kind from that required in the International Fellowships. Our attitude towards the others ought to be absolutely frank and sincere. Our prayers for others ought never to be: 'God, give them the light Thou has given me!', but 'Give them all the light and truth they need for their highest development'."[10]

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9 M. K. Gandhi in *Harijan.* Quoted by S. Radhakrishnan in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 312.

10 Quoted by Romain Rolland, from the 'Notes taken at the annual meeting of the Council of Federation of International Fellowships at the Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati', Jan. 13-15, 1928, in *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, p. 31.

When some one asked him, "Can I not hope to give my religious experience of God to my friend?", he replied:

> Pray rather that God may give your friend the fullest light and knowledge— not necessarily the same that He has given you."[11]

He said to another:

> Pray simply that your friends may become better men, whatever their religion."[12]

Before Gandhiji, Sri Ramakrishna, who in his own life practised the various religions and tested them, declared:

> "You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has error. Every one thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. ...He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul."[13]

Comparative Religion widens Mental Horizon

A comparative study of religion, sometimes called comparative religion, is revealing new facts and is challenging the exclusive claims of any particular religion to be the sole custodian of Truth.

The ancient religions of Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt have ceased to exist, but some of their texts have still been

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11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
13. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 37.

preserved. As these texts are being deciphered, new light is being thrown and we are being forced to revise our conceptions of the uniqueness of our own faiths.

In the ancient teachings of India, particularly in the Upanishads, the seer sometimes speaks of God or the Ultimate Reality as beyond all name and form. Many consider this unique. Comparative religion, however, reveals that an unknown Egyptian seer or poet spoke of God as beyond all expression:

> "He is not seen; He hath neither minister nor offerings; He is not worshipped in temples; His dwelling is not known. There is no habitation which may hold Him; unknown is His name in heaven, and His form is not manifested, for every image of Him is in vain. His home is in the universe; not in any dwelling made human hands."

It is being revealed that Christianity resembles in many respects Mithraism, the ancient mystery religion originating in Persia and spreading to the Roman Empire. December 25, the day on which Christmas is celebrated, was originally the day of the festival of the winter solstice, the day of Mithraic feast, the birthday of the unconquerable Sun god. Mithra was a mediator between God and man. The Mithraists also believed in a moral law and in future life.

Pious Christians of later times who attributed the resemblance to the workings of the devil were shocked to learn of the ancient Mithraic rite of consecration of bread and wine. Many authorities hold that Christianity borrowed this rite from the ancient faith.

Historians tell us further that the cross is thousands of years older than Christ. Some of the ethical teachings of Christ are found in the ancient teachings of the Hindus and

the Buddhists. We learn further that the faith of the ancient Persians with its dualism of good and evil influenced the Jews during their Babylonian captivity. From Judaism the idea of good and evil passed on to Christianity.

The Frog-in-the-Well Mentality

Many of us possess the mentality of the proverbial frog-in-the-well which considers the well to be larger than the ocean, and wants to continue in it. This is positively due to ignorance. It is, however, no new phenomenon.

At a famous meeting of the Free Religious Association of America held in Boston during the latter half of the 19th century, a somewhat over-zealous Christian minister quoted some passages from the Christian gospels and added that those could not be matched in the sacred books of any of the other religions. At this point, the great American Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was well-acquainted with Indian thought, rose and said quietly: "The gentleman's remark only proves how narrowly he has read."

Thoughts influence one another. Through contact with other religions we can all appreciate the practical religious ideal of Zoroastrianism, the living faith in God of Judaism, the burning love of Christ for God and man expressed through the social service of Christianity, the religious fervour and democratic spirit of Mohammed, the ideal of living in harmony with the Cosmic Spirit proclaimed by Lao Tse, the stabilizing and humanizing moral and social ideal of Confucius, the message of righteousness and peace of Buddhism and the ideal of the potential divinity of man and the spirit of unity-in-diversity of Hinduism.

Vivekananda's Message of Universalism

The message of universalism at its best which Swami Vivekananda learnt sitting at the feet of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, was proclaimed by him in 1893 at the Chicago Parliament of Religions:

> "...If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahmanic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum-total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being. ... It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centered in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature. . . . The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."[14]

His concluding words were:

> "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."[15]

Spiritual Experience — the Indispensable Means to Harmony

The reality of religion, its universality and harmonizing influence cannot be proved by the sword or by theological warfare, but by one's own spiritual experience.

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 17-22.
15. *Ibid.*

Continuing the tradition of the great seers of the Vedas who declared: "Truth is One, but sages call it by various names", in the 15th and 16th centuries, Kabir and Nanak proved the reality and essential unity of religions by their own spiritual experience. Kabir declared:

> "God is one whether we worship Him as Allah or as Rama. . . . There is one Father of Hindu or Mussalman, one God in all matter; He is the Lord of all the earth, the guardian in my breast." "Hari dwelleth in the South (Banaras); Allah has His place in the West (Mecca). Search in thy heart, search in the heart of hearts, there is His abode and peace."

Like Kabir, Nanak too, pointed to the common bond between Hinduism and Islam. It is said that Nanak went to Mecca on pilgrimage and when some one reproached him for sleeping with his feet towards the sacred Kaba, he replied: "Show me a direction where God is not." He further declared:

> God has said that man will be saved by his work alone. He will ask a man not his tribe or sect, but what he has done. He alone is a true Hindu whose heart is just, and he only is a good Mohammedan whose life is pure.

Sri Ramakrishna's Direct Experience

In line with these God-men, these prophets of universalism and harmony, came Sri Ramakrishna. He followed many religious paths—Hindu, Sufi, Christian—and attained the same Godhead who is beyond all name and form and yet manifests Himself through all names and forms. He proved in his own life the eternal verity of

religions. Writing about him, Mahatma Gandhi has declared:

> "The story of Ramakrishna's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light."[16]

From his own direct experience Ramakrishna proclaimed the universal spirit of religion:

> "A common man through ignorance considers his own religion to be the best and makes much useless clamour; but when his mind is illumined by true knowledge, all sectarian quarrel disappears.[17] And he knows that the one Satchidananda—Existence-Intelligence-Bliss Absolute — is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari and by others as Brahman."[18]

> "I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Saktas, Vaishnavas, Saivas, all quarrel with one another. They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Siva, and the Primal Sakti, and that it is He, again, who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one Rama and He has a thousand names."[19]

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16. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Foreword.
17. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 153.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
19. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 374.

"Truth is One; only it is called by different names; all people are seeking the same Truth; the variance is due to climate, temperament and name."[20]

"I had to practise each religion for a time — Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas and Vedantists. I realise that there is only one God towards whom all are travelling; but the paths are different."[21]

"Every one is going towards God. They will all realise Him if they have sincerity and longing of heart."[22]

An intelligent study of the various religions brings home to us their special features and their underlying harmony as paths leading to the same goal. However, Sri Ramakrishna realised this harmony not through study but through spiritual experience of the same Godhead attained by following the different religions in form and in spirit, by transcending the forms and reaching the Spirit. He has thrown us the challenge — let the truths of religions be proved by spiritual experience.

The Test of True Religion

To Sri Ramakrishna religion is the experience of the eternal relationship between the eternal soul and the eternal God; all particular religions are paths leading to the same goal of spiritual experience or realisation.

The various religions are like radii leading to the same centre. They come closer to one another as they approach the centre in which they all meet. That was the great

20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 57
22. *Ibid.*

experience of Sri Ramakrishna. All religions can be reduced to three approaches to God-realisation. He experienced them all and demonstrated that they are the three phases of spiritual illumination.

He said:

> "I have come to the final realisation that God is the whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He."[23]

The time has come when we should ask ourselves: "What good is religion if it cannot bring us closer to both God and man?"

If we recognise God as our Master, Father or Mother, we must also feel that we are all fellow-servants, all children of the same God. If we hold that God is the Whole and the Soul is a part, we should feel that we all are fellow-souls — eternal portions of the Supreme Spirit. If we consider that the Ultimate Truth is Unity, we and our neighbours, nay, all beings, are one. Our love towards our fellow-creatures must be based on this fact; and to love is to serve.

There is no such thing as religion by proxy. So, we must be spiritual and realise the Truth for ourselves. If we — each one of us — will try to live our life with earnestness and sincerity, we can discover the harmony within ourselves and transform our warring world into a veritable heaven.

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23. *Ibid*, p. 554.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURES OF SPIRITUAL SEEKERS

A Hero's Job

There is a proverb which says: "He who seeks adventures finds blows." This is very true. But if we get something more than blows, adventures will certainly be welcome. Emerson takes a better view of adventures when he says: "The thirst for adventure is the vent which Destiny offers; a war, a crusade, a gold mine, a new country, speak to the imagination and offer swing and play to the confined powers." A well-directed spiritual life is indeed like waging a war between the higher and lower tendencies. It is like a crusade. We want to reach our Holy Land, avoiding the enemies on the way. As Sri Ramakrishna says, the gold is hidden in our own hearts, but we do not know it. We must search for that gold mine and find it. Through our striving new powers are unfolded and we continue our journey to the domain of the Spirit, and finally the soul reaches its goal, the Ultimate Reality.

The Nature of Reality

The Buddha, the Enlightened, gave to this goal a definite name; he called it *Nirvana,* the destruction of craving. *Nirvana* is passionlessness; being the cessation of selfish existence, it is a transcendental state beyond existence and non-existence. Certainly it is not annihilation.

The illumined souls of other religions, if they speak of the Ultimate Reality as transcendental, also speak of It as immanent. It is something in which all contradictions meet. As Sri Ramakrishna tells us from his own experience, God is both with and without form, and He comes in that form of which no one can speak. Spiritual teachers speak of Brahman, God, Allah, Jehovah, Tao, but they all mean an indivisible spiritual reality. Swami Vivekananda speaks of religion as the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God. And his God is not a far off being; He is everywhere.

Appearance and Reality

Sri Ramakrishna says that most people are more interested in the creation than in its author. There is a story illustrating this, by Vyasa who wrote the *Mahabharata*:

> 'A certain man had the peculiar ability to grunt expertly like a pig, and he did this so well that whenever he grunted where pigs were grazing, they would all turn around to see if another new member had come into their fold. This man's fame spread abroad and he began a tour to obtain money by means of his art, erecting a pandal (a shed similar to a carnival booth) wherever he went and issuing tickets for admision. His success was tremendous, such was the eagerness of people to hear him grunt.
>
> "While he was thus making money in a village, a sage happened to pass by with his disciples. It struck the sage that he could teach a good lesson to his disciples through this incident. Accordingly, he ordered a small pandal to be erected and advertised that better grunting could be heard there free of charge. The people were naturally very eager to hear it and they rushed in.

"The sage brought forth a live pig and by squeezing it a little made it grunt. Really, the grunt was much better than the man's, but the people exclaimed with annoyance, 'Pooh! Is this all? We hear this every day, but what is there in it? It is nothing wonderful.' And they went away. In spite of the loud tom-tom which the sage used to attract people, no one would enter his pandal, while that of the pig-imitator was crowded to suffocation every few minutes. After all the people had left his pandal, the sage addressed his disciples, saying, 'Here is a splendid lesson for us. Men seldom care for reality but always go in for imitation. That is why this world exists, a mere imitation, a reflection in the distorting mirror of Maya, of the great Atman. No external help is needed to see the Self, but very few want It and even if you eagerly advertise It, none will come to you except those who love Truth for Truth's sake. Reflect on this.' "

That is why people love the world. It is an imitation a reflection in the distorting mirror of Maya of the Atman, the Eternal Spirit, and no external help is required to see the Self. But very few want to see it or care for the Truth. We live in a strange world; people want queer, fantastic miracles. They follow cults that promise physical perfection and the way to attain perpetual health and youth, and which offer them unbounded wealth without any form of poverty, infinite enjoyment without pain or harmful consequence. Madame Guyon, a great author of the seventeenth century French mysticism, has said:

"They speak of (God's) love, but little feel its sway. While in their bosom many an idol lurks, they leave the Creator's hands and cling unto his works."

The goal of religion is the direct apprehension of God, the spiritual reality, as distinct from phenomenal existence. In Western religious literature this is known as mysticism.

What it means to be a Real Mystic

By mystics are meant those who love Truth for its own sake, and have followed the path and reached the Truth. A true mystic is he who has attained an immediate experience of the Ultimate Reality through his intuitive powers transcending reason and sense perception.

Why have there been so few real mystics in the world? As ancient Vyasa has said—'men seldom care for reality, but always go in for imitation.' Christ has remarked: 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' What he meant was that few are called and fewer still are chosen. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna observes:

> "Among thousands of men, one here and there strives for perfection, and of those who strive for perfection and success, one, perchance, knows the Divine Reality in Truth."[1]

And Sri Ramakrishna tells us:

> "Seeking the beautiful garden of a rich man, every one is struck with wonder, but how many seek to know the master of the garden?"[2]

He further explains this idea with the help of a parable:

> "Once two holy men, in the course of their wanderings, met in a city. One of them, with his baggage in his hand, was walking about seeing the market place, the stalls and the buildings. The other was moving about freely without any baggage. The first man asked: 'Where is your baggage?' and the second replied, 'As soon as I arrived I found a good place to live in and secured a

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1. VII. 3.
2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 265.

room. I put everything in it, and am going about enjoying my sight-seeing and all the fun."[3]

Here is a lesson for us all. Being born in this world, our teachers tell us that the highest goal is to find the Truth and not to move about from one thing to another merely sight-seeing and forgetting this ideal, the greatest privilege in this life, the realization of Truth.

Spiritual life, as each of us who are trying to live it in our humble way know, is certainly an adventure, a daring feat, a bold undertaking. It has its perils and difficulties, and also its pleasurable excitement, its joys. In the course of their evolution, some souls cannot live a dull life. They must have something of an adventurous nature, and some of these prefer the adventures of spiritual or mystical life. This spiritual adventure is sometimes likened to a journey up the snow-capped mountains. Great training is necessary. Here is a story of a friend of mine who wanted to climb Mont Blanc. He asked a guide to take him. The guide said: "I won't tell you now whether I'll take you climbing or not. Let us go for a walk first." And so they walked together for hours through most difficult paths, my friend withstanding the strain very well. The guide was well pleased and agreed to take him up the mountain.

Obstacles and Pitfalls

In mountain climbing there are many hindrances and even dangers which may prevent the climber from reaching the top. As one climbs and moves along the stages, one may be attracted by a grand view of the land below and

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 257. (Adapted)

thus stop one's journey, or one may be enchanted by a view of the higher regions and tempted to sit down and look at the snow-capped mountain tops from a distance, forgetting to move onward. Likewise, in the spiritual life, as we go into subtler and subtler regions, as we unfold new powers of seeing or hearing, we may be attracted by the charms of the outer world and may encounter a danger all spiritual souls have to face, and may be lured by the perils of the psychic world into forgetting our ultimate goal.

Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of a man who, at the beginning of his spiritual quest, practised discipline in a very austere way and eventually developed the strange power of being able to make himself disappear from the view of others and move about as he pleased. But although he had advanced to a great degree he did not have a pure heart and he used this power for selfish motives and for leading a sensual life. The result was that, after a time, this man lost this extraordinary power along with what he had gained spiritually.

Swami Vivekananda once came to possess the power of clairvoyance and clairaudience. He could see things at a distance and hear what was happening far away. This ability just came to him unsought, as is sometimes the case with spiritual seekers who progress along the path. He reported this to the Master, who ordered him to stop meditation for a few days and thus close that channel that was leading him towards psychic powers.

My own teacher, Swami Brahmananda, used to say that at one time he could see in and through people, and judge them accordingly. That was when Sri Ramakrishna was alive, and young Brahmananda, on seeing that certain people were not pure, refused to admit them to the Master's

presence. But the Master wished to see such people and help them, no matter how bad they might have been, and this disciple was standing in their way. He was severely rebuked by the Master who said: "Don't waste your energy on all these psychic powers. Move towards the Truth." Swami Brahmananda followed his spiritual path and became greatly illumined later on. When we had the privilege of sitting at his feet we found that he had strange powers by which he could lift our consciousness to higher planes, but he used these powers with great discrimination.

There are many who start their spiritual life in all sincerity but, later on, becoming interested in extra-sensory perception and psychic powers, miss their goal.

Stages of Consciousness

Our entire consciousness is likened to a big mansion of several storeys. There is the lower basement, upper basement and first floor. There is the mezzanine between the two. Having risen a little above this plane of self we get into this intermediate region in which we may develop psychic powers whereby we can see and hear more than others; if we are very inquisitive we shall be caught at this stage, unable to proceed further. But if we ignore the temptation to delve into such things we rise higher and higher and come into touch with the personal aspect of the Deity, the Deity as immanent and, further still, we may reach the highest point in which the individual loses himself in universal consciousness. And our teachers tell us, there is a stage beyond that, in which the illumined soul can move about wherever he pleases, feeling that he is a part of the Infinite Existence, or God.

Temptations

Various are the temptations that might appear before us, and for this reason all teachers stress the need for purity. Sri Krishna tells us:

> "Objects of the senses fall away soon from a man practising abstinence, but not the taste thereof. The taste disappears when the Spirit is realized."[4]

The religious histories of the world tell us how the Buddha was tempted by Mara, the Evil One, how Christ was tempted by Satan, and how Sri Ramakrishna was tempted by what we call *Papa-Purusha,* the personification of sin. Everyone has to pass through these temptations, but great souls do not succumb like ordinary mortals. Our lower nature may all of a sudden come up and assert itself but if we are established in purity we have nothing to fear.

Further Warnings

Swami Vivekananda warned his brother disciples of further hazards and hurdles confronting spiritual aspirants. He said that eighty per cent of those who take to spiritual life become hypocrites; it is easier to be a hypocrite, to make an outward show without changing inwardly, than to pass through all the troubles and difficulties of intense spiritual life. Fifteen per cent become insane; those who are not pure enough but try to be in touch with the cosmic force come to grief. Many people ruin themselves that way. If we want to pass a high voltage of electricity through a weak wire, what will happen? We shall blow a

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4. *The Bhagavad Gita,* II. 59.

fuse, and so there is great need for the practice of purity. Five per cent of those who start spiritual life and steadily purify themselves move towards the goal. One should learn the secret of keeping oneself perfectly under control.

All great spiritual teachers tell us to avoid the attractions of passing enjoyments, lust, wealth and power. If we want to go in for this great adventure of mystical life, we need plenty of training.

Qualifications Necessary for Spiritual Attainment

Sankara, the great monistic philosopher, speaks of four qualifications necessary for spiritual attainment, and all mystics, more or less, speak in the same terms. There must be discrimination between the Eternal Spirit and the non-eternal, changing phenomenal existence. There must be the spirit of renunciation, of dispassion, without which one can never succeed in spiritual life. The anchored boat cannot move, and similarly, if the soul is anchored to objects of desire it cannot move towards the spirit. We need a calm mind, controlled senses, a mental peace that will not allow us to be affected by outside stimuli. We need a great faith in the instructions placed before us by our teachers. And we must have great faith in ourselves and our possibilities of attaining the goal, and along with that we must at all times practise self-surrender. In his Crest-jewel of Discrimination, Sankara says:

> "Only through God's Grace may we obtain the three rarest advantages: human birth, the longing for liberation, and discipleship to an illumined teacher."[5]

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5. *Vivekachudamani*, 3.

It is necessary for us to have a tremendous longing for liberation. It is the will to be free from the bonds forced on us by our environment, by our body, our thoughts, emotions and even by our little ego. The soul yearns to be free, and through our becoming aware of this we undergo what the mystics call a spiritual conversion or awakening, and we begin to centre our life on a high spiritual ideal. A new aspiration is born in the soul, which feels the need of a larger draught of air, a more expansive horizon, and which desires direct contact with the Infinite Existence.

The Testimony of the Mystics

Meditation, if properly practised, leads to the superconscious state—the soul's communion with the Oversoul. By the practice of the various paths of Yoga impurities are destroyed and the intuitive faculty lying dormant within us expresses itself, and it is with this inner light, without an external guide, that the soul moves towards the Truth. As Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, says:

> "It is the flight of the alone to the Alone."

Nothing is going to accompany us expect the pure mind. It was for this reason that Swami Brahmananda used to tell us:

> "Let your mind be so pure that the mind becomes your teacher."[6]

When the mind becomes pure, it directly receives the instructions of the Teacher of all teachers—call Him the Buddha, give Him any name—who dwells in every heart.

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6. *The Eternal Companion*, p. 126.

The Christian mystic, Richard of St. Victor, declares:

> "Let him that thirsts to see God clean his mirror, let him make his spirit bright."

Practice of Meditation

Dhyana or contemplation or meditation on the Primeval Being is not an easy task. We must have training, and the best course is to take up some Divine Name or some holy prayer and go on brooding over it. In course of time that current of thought will flow uninterrupted. That is meditation. As our teachers tell us:

> "When we pour oil from one cup to another the stream is unbroken. Meditation is like that."

Meditation leads to absorption and eventually to the highest realization. But one must control one's thoughts. We may use various imaginations; we may think of God as light, for example, and be absorbed in that thought. But there are imaginations and imaginations! We may imagine a castle in the air, but we can never live in that castle; we may think of a hare with horns on the head and, meditating on it, may even think that we ourselves have got two horns, but such fantastic imaginations cannot be realized. Imagination about the Divine is not like that. It is imagination about the Truth, intensive thought about the Truth. It removes all wrong notions and then the mind becomes a neutral ground. When we add acid to alkali we get a neutral substance, and when the mind has become, as Patanjali says, "free from all waves," the Inner Truth flashes and this is spiritual realization. But for this to happen a long period of preparation is necessary.

The Mystics' Realizations

St. Theognis, a mystic of the Greek orthodox Church, referring to his realization, says:

> "A strange word will I say to thee. There is some hidden mystery which proceeds between God and the soul. This is experienced by those who achieve the highest heights of perfect purity of love and faith, when man, changing completely, unites with God as His own, through ceaseless prayer and contemplation."[7]

Here the mystic is telling us something about the highest forms of spiritual practice. We have said that spiritual life is an adventure; it has its hazards and dangers, but it also has its divine visions, experiences, joy and bliss. Attaining this divine realization Lao Tse declares:

> "How pure and still is the Supreme Being,
> How deep and unfathomable."
> "To be in accord with man is human happiness, but to be in accord with God is the happiness of God."

And there end all sense pleasures. Plotinus, when he had known the highest spiritual experiences, said:

> "Now I am roused from the body to my true self and emerge from all else and enter myself and behold a marvellous beauty. I lead a supremely good life and become identical with the Godhead. Then it is that we are kindled."

The soul shines with a new light, with a new joy, with a new peace.

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7. Quoted by P.D. Ouspensky. *Tertium Organum*, pp. 287-8, from M.I. Lodizhensky's *Super-conciosusness and the Path to its Attainment* (Original in Russian).

Sankara, thus speaks of the achievement of the illumined soul:

> "My ego has disappeared, I have realised my identity with the Supreme Spirit. What is this joy that I feel—the joy of mystic realization? Who shall measure it? I know nothing but joy, limitless, unbounded."[8]

Eckhart, the Christian mystic, says:

> "I am as certain as that I live, that nothing is so near to me as God."

He is the source of all consciousness. He is the Ultimate Reality.

> "Where the two become one, one loses its nature."

The Soul loses itself in the superconsciousness. Angela da Foligna tells us of her experience:

> "Then the soul is illumined by the presence of God, when God and it are lost in each other, it apprehends and possesses with joy good things which it cannot describe. The soul swims in joy and knowledge."

This great joy is the experience of all spiritual teachers. St. Francis, the nature mystic, confirms this. Before his death he started singing the glory of God. When a brother complained saying, "Brother, such a demeanour is not befitting the death of a holy person like you," the saint replied,

> "Suffer me to rejoice in my Lord. I feel so united with Him that I needs must sing."

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8. Sankaras Crest-jewel of Discrimination (*Vivekachudamani*), pp. 131-2.

Here we get a glimpse of Divine Communion. One of Sri Ramakrishna's great disciples, Swami Turiyananda, was on his death-bed. He was fully conscious of the Divine Reality, and he repeated one of the texts of the Upanishads: "Brahman, the Supreme Spirit, is intelligence, He is eternal bliss."

My spiritual teacher, Swami Brahmananda, when about to pass away, addressing the disciples and others present said: "Brahman is the only Reality. Everything else is unreal, I am floating on the leaf of faith in the ocean of Brahman. Ah! the blissful ocean of Brahman."

These experiences of Divine Bliss only come to the mystic as a result of his pursuing his adventurous journey through many difficulties, sufferings and heartaches.

The Simple Secret

A story is told that once a disciple of the Sufi mystic, Junayd, came to him and said:

"I am told that you possess the pearl of divine know ledge; either give it to me or sell it to me." Junayd answered: "I cannot sell it, for you have not the price thereof; and if I give it to you, you will have gained it too cheaply. You do not know its value. Cast yourself head-long, like me, into this Ocean of God in order that you yourself may find this pearl of Divine love and wisdom."

And that is exactly what Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples, quoting a song: "Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the ocean of God's beauty. If you descend to the uttermost depths, there you will find the gem of Love"—the gem of Divine knowledge and the gem of bliss.

The illumined soul's love for God expresses itself as love for man—for the God in man. But we must realize

this Divine love, each one of us, for ourselves. If we wish to pursue this high spiritual ideal we must be prepared to undergo training, and we must learn to float in Brahman instead of floating on the surface of our consciousness absorbed in this world of sense. We must go deeper and deeper.

CHAPTER III

THE PURSUIT AND ATTAINMENT OF HAPPINESS

What is Happiness

Happiness has been defined as "the enjoyment or pleasurable satisfaction attendant upon well-being or welfare of some kind or other." It is regarded by many as "the state of satisfaction which is experienced in the pursuit, but more obviously in the attainment, of that which is regarded as desirable or good."

We human beings are in different stages of evolution, and so have different conceptions of happiness and the means to its attainment. A man who had become a money-making machine regarded money as the highest goal. He claimed that he knew the five secrets of happiness. When asked, "What are the five secrets of happiness?" he promptly answered, "Money, money, money, money, money!"

But does mere money make a man happy? What of the dyspeptic, insomniac, unhappy millionaires? They cannot buy appetite, sleep or happiness with any amount of money.

The great American leaders who proclaimed the Declaration of Independence on the 4th July, 1776, wrote:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

It is said that Jefferson, who made the draft, first wrote, "Life, Liberty, and Wealth". Then, upon reflection, he changed the word "wealth" into the more meaningful phrase, "pursuit of Happiness".

It is happiness we all seek in some form or other. We want it for ourselves and for those we love. We want happiness in this life and also in the life to come. There is the story of a widow who was eager to know how her departed husband was doing. She consulted a medium who put her in communication with her husband. "Peter," she asked, "are you happy now?" Peter answered, "I am very happy!" The widow, continuing, asked: "Are you happier than you were on earth with me?" Peter promptly replied: "Yes, I am far happier than I was on earth with you." Then the widow inquired: "Tell me, Peter, what is it like in heaven?" "Heaven!" cried Peter, "I'm not in heaven." He was in hell and found it better than earth, so far as he was concerned. Sometimes we human beings make life on earth even worse than hell, so that real hell appears to be much better! However, let us not think too much of the after-life. Let us see if we can be happy in this very life before we die.

The Supreme Happiness

In Sanskrit the words for happiness are Ananda, Sukha, Rasa, Shanti, or bliss, joy, ecstasy, peace. In their highest sense, the Sanskrit words means Bliss of the Spirit, Boundless Joy, Ecstatic State of Consciousness and the Peace that passes understanding.

What is the highest happiness? And who is the happiest man? Sri Ramakrishna states,

> "There are three kinds of Ananda or joy; the joy of worldly enjoyment, the joy of worship, and the joy of Brahman or the Supreme Spirit."[1]

The happiest man is one who has realized that Brahman has become everything. Therefore, to the *Vijnani* — the man of fullest spiritual realization — the world is a 'mansion of mirth'. But to the *Jnani,* whose experience is partial, it is a 'framework of illusion'. Sri Ramakrishna continues:

> "God keeps a little 'I' in His devotee, even after giving him the knowledge of Brahman. Through that 'I' the devotee enjoys the infinite play of God. He retains the 'I' in order to taste the Bliss of God and teach people. He has realized both aspects of God, personal and impersonal."[2]

Various Conceptions of Happiness

Popular ethics tends to indicate that what man really seeks is happiness. That being the case, moral maxims point out the right means and warn against the wrong ones for achieving it. The question arises: "Whose happiness and what sort of happiness should we seek?" The answers vary.

According to some schools of thought, each individual should seek his own happiness in his own way. This point of view is egocentric. (*a*) In its crudest form egoistic happiness is identified with sensuous pleasure, and its slogan is "Eat, drink, and be merry." (*b*) In its finer form, egoistic happiness attaches a greater value to the pleasures of the mind, derived from the pursuit of know-

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 432.
1. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

ledge, art and science. (*c*) In its highest form, egoistic happiness is identified with moral and spiritual transformation of the personality. But the attitude continues to be egoistic; it is the individual's happiness that is sought.

According to the universalist, the goal to be reached is the happiness not only of the individual but also of the community. From the purely egoistic point of view, the seeker after happiness is interested in other persons only in so far as they serve his purpose in some form or other, whereas the universalist holds that no individual must count as more than one, and the happiness aimed at should be the greatest to the greatest number.

Altruistic eudaemonism, or pursuit of the happiness of others even at the expense of one's own, is another attitude. Self-denial leads to self-fulfilment on a higher plane. Through self-sacrifice, the doer of good comes to attain inner happiness. When the mind becomes pure, it reflects the individual's inner light and bliss. This type of inner happiness, which is still egocentric, springs from the *Anandamayakosa* "sheath of bliss," which individualizes consciousness and makes the soul feel distinct from others. According to Vedanta, the soul is a part, or better, a reflection of the Infinite Spirit, *Sat-Chit-Ananda,* Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The individual soul, as distinct from the body, senses, and mind, possesses its own bliss, limited though it is. As we shall see later, the highest form of happiness is that which comes from perfect desirelessness and spiritual experience.

Three Kinds of Happiness

Before we proceed further, let us see what Sri Krishna tells us of happiness in the Bhagavad Gita. There are three

kinds of happiness: (1) That happiness which begins and ends in delusion, and arises from sleep, indolence, and heedlessness is declared to be "dull". It is born of Tamas, or cosmic forces inducing dullness. (2) That happiness which arises from the contact of objects with the senses, which though at first like nectar, is like poison at the end, is declared to be "passionate". It is the product of Rajas, or cosmic forces creating restlessness. (3) That happiness which one learns to enjoy through practice, by which one comes to the end of pain, and which is like poison at first but like nectar at the end, is declared to be "pure", born of Sattva, or cosmic forces producing harmony.[3]

In its highest aspect, happiness does not originate from external things. It is brought about by Self-knowledge. The man of spiritual realization enjoys it through communion with the Supreme Self. "Gaining this, one thinks that there is no greater gain, and being established in this one is not moved even by the greatest sorrow."[4] The source of this happiness is in the Supreme Self, the God who dwells in every one of us, and is within the reach of every one of us. If only we could know or experience it, Self-realization or the Supreme Divine Experience will bring the highest bliss to the illumined soul.

All Religions Promise Happiness

All religions in some form or the other, promise joy, felicity, beatitude and bliss to their followers.

Zoroastrianism holds that holiness, the best of all good, is also happiness. The man with perfect holiness is perfectly happy.

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3. XVIII. 36-39.
4. *Ibid.*, VI.22.

According to *Judaism* the presence of the Lord is full of everlasting joy.

Christianity declares that in the Kingdom of God there is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

According to *Islam*, the believer in God who desires union with God and the spiritual path attains to real happiness.

Buddhism holds, one who practises charity, tranquillity and friendship to all beings, attains the state of abiding happiness.

Lao Tse declares that the man who speaks, thinks and practises what is good is blessed. Being in accord with Tao (the Supreme Reality) he attains the abiding happiness of Tao.

Confucius advises man to be entirely virtuous that he may enjoy every happiness.

The *Vedanta* declares in the Upanishads: "That one Supreme Ruler, the Self of all beings, who makes His form manifold — those wise ones who perceive Him as existing in their own soul, to them belongs eternal happiness and to none else."[5] Adds the Bhagavad Gita: "The Yogi who has become perfectly tranquil and has quieted his passions, who is free from all impurities, attains with ease the infinite bliss of communion with the Supreme Spirit."[6]

Is Happiness an End in Itself?

All religions promise happiness to their votaries. But is happiness an end in itself or the consequence of the attainment of some desired end?

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5. *The Katha Upanishad*, V. 12.
6. *The Bhagavad Gita*, V. 26.

Some psychologists strongly criticize the view that happiness is an end in itself. They hold that happiness "is *not* usually either the actual end or object desired, or even the conscious purpose for which something else is sought." For the most part, they say, it is only people devoid of interest in things who voice a longing for happiness.

The Vedanta meets this criticism boldly. Seers of Truth declare in the Upanishad:

> "That One who is Self-existent is verily Joy, Bliss, and Supreme Happiness. Who would have lived and breathed had not this Infinite Bliss existed? This verily is that which bestows bliss—the highest happiness."[7]

Realizing Brahman, the knower is freed from fear, want, and desires, and is filled with Supreme Bliss, Happiness and Peace.

Types of Happiness

All beings reflect this happiness according to their evolution.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad there is a chapter on the examination of Ananda or Bliss. A youth — noble, well-versed in the scriptures, full of hope, resolute and strong — has the whole world before him. That is the unit measure of human bliss. A hundredfold of that human bliss is the unit measure of Gandharvas or quasi-celestial beings. Countless hundreds of times of that bliss is the unit of bliss of the Devas or higher celestial beings. Many a hundredfold of that bliss is the unit of Brihaspati, the great preceptor of the celestial beings. One hundred times of that bliss is the unit of bliss of Prajapati, or the Cosmic

7. *The Taittiriya Upanishad*, II : 7.

Being. Truly infinite is the Bliss of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit. This is realized by the Knower of Brahman.

Being absolutely freed from desires for worldly and also heavenly enjoyments, the fully illumined soul alone experiences infinite bliss. All other beings get, at the most, only a particle of it.

Attainment of Happiness Through Desirelessness

Truly speaking the happiness we realize within does not exist in outward things or persons. When a desire is satisfied momentarily we become desireless. Then a bit of the bliss that is within us wells up.

The very fact that a person who brings us happiness at one time may cause us misery at another shows that the happiness we feel comes from our mood of dispassion revealing to us the Supreme Spirit which is of the nature of Bliss. The quality, quantity, and duration of bliss we may enjoy depends upon the quality, quantity, and duration of our desirelessness. In his childlike way, Sri Ramakrishna remarked:

> "If a person can be fully free from desires he can attain the state of the Paramahamsa — the perfectly illumined and free soul — and realize the Infinite Divine Joy and Bliss."[8]

Happiness According to Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna's great disciple, Swami Vivekananda, speaks of three kinds of happiness: (1) In animals, and in the lowest of human beings who are very much like animals, happiness is all in the body; (2) happiness in men who are of a higher order lies on a higher plane — that of

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 304.

thought; and (3) happiness in the *Jnani* the man of Self-realization, is the highest and is experienced in the Supreme Self.

Teachers of Vedanta speak of three stages or layers of veils which cover the *Sat-Chit-Ananda:* the first layer of ignorance veils Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, the second layer of ignorance covers the Consciousness aspect and Bliss aspect of Reality, and the third layer of ignorance hides the Bliss aspect. Because of its being covered by three layers of ignorance, Bliss is difficult to realize. However, there are means of removing the veils.

The first veil of ignorance is removed by properly directed reason, which aids in the discovery of Truth. The second veil is removed by partial knowledge, which we have in self-consciousness, self-analysis and introspection. The third veil is destroyed only by full intuition or direct knowledge of the Spiritual Reality.

Where to find Happiness

Spiritual experience alone enables the illumined soul to realize not only Infinite Existence and Consciousness, but also Bliss, which is the essence of the Spirit, and these three are lying hidden in the heart of every one of us.

In our ignorance we try to express this bliss through our human love — love of husband, wife, children, friends. No doubt there is a drop of this Infinite Bliss in the crudest form of love and happiness. But this love is to be purified, this happiness spiritualized.

Some Western psychologists consider sex to be the motivating force in life; others hold that desire for power is the guiding incentive. The Hindu spiritual teachers hold that in everything there is a conscious and sub-conscious

urge for Ananda, or the Highest Happiness. Having forgotten its real nature owing to ignorance, the soul tries to find Infinite Bliss in the finite, but it fails miserably. Infinite bliss can be found only in the Infinite Being. That is what the seers of the Upanishads declare: "The Infinite alone is Bliss. There is no abiding bliss in anything finite. The Infinite only is Bliss. The Infinite alone is Supreme Happiness, and must be realised."[9]

The source of the Highest Happiness lies in every one of us! Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the man with a lighted lantern in his hand going to a neighbour's house and asking for fire to light his pipe illustrates the point. The 'fire' he wants is with him, although he forgets about it and seeks it elsewhere. Then there is the ancient Hindu illustration of the musk-deer who, deluded, wanders around in the woods, searching madly for the fragrant musk that is to be found within its own navel. The Infinite Happiness we seek very earnestly lies in our own hearts, but our desires and passions, lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy stand in the way. What should we do?

Here, in brief, is the practical instruction which Sri Krishna gives in the Bhagavad Gita: Purify the mind, quiet the passions, establish your connection with the Supreme Spirit. You will attain Supreme Bliss. You will behold the Divine Spirit in yourself and yourself in the Divine Spirit manifest in all beings. Worship the One Spirit dwelling in all beings, meditate on Him, love Him, commune with Him, serve Him in all beings, and enjoy the Bliss of Him who is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss.

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9. *The Chandogya Upanishad*, VII: 23 : 1.

CHAPTER IV

THE TYPE OF SALVATION WE WANT

An Upanishadic Anecdote

There are various conceptions of salvation, a few of which are being treated in these pages. Here is an anecdote from the Upanishads, the most spiritual of the ancient Hindu scriptures:

> The Self which is free from impurities, from old age and death, from grief, hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire, is to be sought after, is to be inquired about, is to be realized; and he who learns about the Self, the Supreme Spirit, and realizes It, obtains all the worlds and all desires.
>
> The gods and the demons both heard of this truth, and they thought to themselves: Let us seek after it and realize the Self so that we may obtain all the worlds and all desires. Thereupon Indra, the king of the gods, and Virochana, the king of the demons, went to Prajapati, the renowned teacher, and for thirty-two years they lived with him as pupils.
>
> Then Prajapati asked them why they had both lived with him so long, and they replied: "We have heard it said that one who realizes the Self obtains all the worlds and all desires. We have lived here because we want to learn of the Self." Prajapati replied: "That which is seen with the eye, That is the Self, That is immortal, That is fearless and That is Brahman." The disciples inquired, "Sir, is that the Self which is reflected in the water or in the mirror?" And the teacher replied, "The Self is

indeed reflected in these. Look at yourselves in the water and whatever you do not understand, come and tell me about it." So both of the disciples gazed on their reflections in the water and returned to the sage saying, "Sir, we have seen the Self. We have seen even the hair and the nails all reflected in the water." Then the teacher bade them put on their finest clothes and look again in the water. This they did, and returning to the sage said, "We have seen the Self exactly as ourselves, well-adorned and in our finest clothes." And the teacher rejoined, "The Self is indeed seen in these. The Self is immortal, fearless. It is Brahman, the Infinite." And the pupils were mightily pleased and went away.

The teacher looking at them lamented: "Both of them departed without analyzing or discriminating, without fully comprehending the Self. Whoever follows a false doctrine of the Self will perish."

Now, the king of the demons was satisfied for his part that he had found out the Self— —he was convinced that the body was the Self. He returned to the demons and began to teach them that the body alone is to be worshipped, the body alone is to be served, and that he who worships the body, serves the body, gains both worlds—this one and the next. And the Upanishads say: "Such doctrine is in truth the doctrine of the demons."

But Indra, the king of the gods, on his way back realized the uselessness of this knowledge. As the Self seems to be well-adorned when the body is well-adorned, and well-dressed when the body is well-dressed, so it will be blind when the body is blind, lame when the body is lame, deformed when the body is deformed, and when the body dies the same Self will also die. In such a knowledge he saw no good.

If all of us could see like that, it would be wonderful! But now, to continue our story:

So Indra returned to the teacher and asked for further instructions, and the teacher required of him to live with him for another thirty-two years after which time he taught him thus: "That which moves about in dreams, enjoying sensuous delights and clothed in glory — That is the Self, That is immortal, That is fearless, and That is Brahman, the Infinite." Pleased with what he had heard, the king of the gods again departed, but before he reached the other gods, he realized the uselessness of this knowledge too. "True it is that this Self is not blind when the body is blind, nor lame or hurt when the body is lame or hurt, but even in dream it may be conscious of many sufferings. So in this doctrine also I see no good."

So he went back to the teacher for further instruction. The teacher now bade him live with him for another thirty-two years, and when the time had passed, told him, "When the man is sound asleep, free from dreams and at perfect rest, That is the Self. The Self is immortal, It is fearless, It is Brahman." Now Indra went away, but before he had reached home he felt the uselessness of even this knowledge. "In reality," he thought, "one does not know one's self as this or as that while asleep. One is not conscious, in fact, of any existence at all. The state of one in deep sleep is next to annihilation. I see no good in this knowledge either."

So once more the pupil returned to his teacher and the teacher asked him to stay with him yet another five years. When this time had passed, the teacher revealed to him the highest truth about himself: "This body is mortal, always gripped by death. But within it dwells the immortal Self. This Self, when associated with our consciousness of the body, is subject to pleasure and pain; and so long as this association continues, freedom from pleasure and pain cannot be had by any man. But as this association ceases, there cease also the pleasure and pain. Rising above physical consciousness and knowing the Self to be distinct

from the senses and the mind, knowing It in Its true light, one rejoices and is free."[1]

This is the salvation, our teachers tell us, which the spiritual seeker should try to realize.

No Lasting Satisfaction Possible on the Sense-plane

We are all in different stages of evolution and naturally cherish various ideals of life. To the demon—and many of us may not be much better than the demon—the body is the Self. We may not like to be called demons but most of us follow the cult of body-worship and sense enjoyment. Physical enjoyment seems to be the be-all and end-all of life, and very often we want to find our heaven, our salvation in worldly relationship, completely forgetting the Divine Spirit who shines in the hearts of us all.

There is the story of a young man who met a girl and thought she was an angel. He married the "angel" and several months later the wife admonished her husband, saying, "Well, my dear, before we were married you used to call me an angel; but now you don't call me anything at all." The husband replied quietly, "I'm surprised at my self-control." He had already known the nature of the "angel" and felt greatly annoyed, but controlled his temper.

Well, "angel" in one case may be a man, in another a woman; but if we try to find angels, perfect beings, in this world of imperfection, we are certainly deluded. There cannot be any real satisfaction in human relationships.

In ancient India there was a class of materialists—gross materialists, as bad as the worst in the West — and

1. *The Chandogya Upanishad*. Translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, pp. 123-7.

they held that the goal of life was to eat, drink and be merry. Eat well, it doesn't matter even if you run into debt! Everywhere, they said, we see pleasure mixed with pain. Is it wise on our part to give up pleasure simply because it brings pain? No, we are going to make ourselves as happy as we can and when the end comes, we go —nothing is left. Souls adopting this gross, materialistic conception of salvation are bound to come to grief.

As distinct from this kind of salvation, there is another that is called the "egotistic", based on refined materialistic ideas. Those who belong to this school do not believe in anything other than the body, but they believe in living a life of moderation, and want to attain a sort of intellectual repose and equilibrium in the organism.

No Security in the World of Fancy

Modern psychologists speak of the introverts. The introvert wants to run away from life, wants to run away even from himself. He wants to live in the world of dreams. He conjures up a fool's paradise. He builds a false ego, an idealized image, a fictitious, illusory self, and delights in it. We hear people saying, "Oh, I am so kindhearted and compassionate! What a spiritual soul I am and what a poetic vision I have, but the poor world cannot appreciate me." Being frustrated in life, we want to make amends for it in the world of fancy, and the inevitable result is disaster.

Sometimes we read trashy novels or sensational detective stories, or we go to see dirty motion pictures. Why? In order to remain in the world of dreams. And again, we sometimes try to enjoy vicariously ignoble things which we are afraid of doing ourselves and yet which we like. In the

circumstances we try to run away from ourselves. A psychiatrist gives us some illustrations:

> A girl poses as being very wonderfully religious; she makes it a point to read newspapers carefully for items of sin, and the result is that she knows more about sin than about religion. And when anyone asks her why she does this, she says she wishes to test her self-control over sinful thoughts!
>
> A young man is mortally afraid of dying, but he is completely up-to-date on all literature on the subject of death. While, as he says, he is scared to think of dying, he dwells on the idea incessantly and even enjoys it.[2]

Self-forgetfulness — No Solution

I have known people who have a wonderful knack of forgetting things, and in trying to forget the unpleasant, they sometimes forget their duties as well. There are people who take strong sleeping tablets in order to forget their worries. Once a lady came to see me and showed me five terrible-looking red capsules. "What do you do with these?" I asked her. She replied, "I use them when I need a good sleep and want to forget my troubles." Somehow I was able to persuade her to give me those capsules, which I passed on to a doctor friend. I told her of the danger of using the stuff when she, a normally healthy person, could practise relaxation with her simple prayers and meditation. She followed the advice with great benefit.

There are persons who, in the name of practising meditation, induce a kind of very relaxing sleep. They get sleep

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2. Cf. *The Person in the Body*, Leland E. Hinsie, M.D., p. 173.

and relaxation all right, but that is not meditation because it does not bring illumination of any kind.

The salvation which our spiritual teachers place before us can be obtained not through escapism, not by running away from life, not by running away from ourselves, but by facing the realities of life, by rising above them and reaching a higher state of consciousness.

All great religions hold out the ideal of salvation in some form or other, the conceptions ranging from a person being sent to a higher sphere or heaven after death as a reward for performing good deeds in this life, to the exalted view of Vedanta whose goal is that the individual should attain the fullest realization in this very life, before the body dies.

Salvation According to the Various Religions

Zoroastrian View: Zoroastrianism speaks of four types of salvation. There is the heaven for those who think good thoughts, the heaven for those who speak good words, another for those who do good deeds and then the highest heaven, the abode of Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Spirit, attained only by those who in addition to leading a virtuous life at the same time worship the Lord. Sometimes an attempt is made to locate these heavens in the regions of the stars, the moon or the sun. But the highest heaven has no location. The spiritual seeker discovers it everywhere, and in it the dweller enjoys supreme happiness.

Ahura Mazda will not allow even the worst sinner to suffer indefinitely — there is no conception of an eternal hell in Zoroastrianism. In due course the sinner will be

purged of his sins, and putting on an immortal body will live in the company of Ahura Mazda. In this form of salvation the devotee feels the presence of God.

Judaic View: In Judaism, we find the psalmist saying, "Oh, Lord, create in me a clean heart. Oh, Lord, renew right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. . . ."

Judaism does not believe in the need for a saviour, an intermediary between man and God. The highest ideal is to love God and practise virtue, and that is the highest bliss. The aspirant enjoys the presence of God.

Christian View: In Christianity, salvation is the restoring of man to God's fellowship, a fellowship which has been broken by the sin of the first man. This, the Christian feels, is to be established through the life and death of Jesus Christ in some form or other.

There are various ideas about salvation. One school finds that God elects some to be saved and some to be lost; not man's effort, but God's decree alone can bring about one's salvation. Another school holds that to every man is given a chance to be saved, and those who do not avail themselves of this chance are lost. The third school, that of the Universalists, holds that no soul is ultimately lost. These Universalists form a minority, but their number is growing; some of them are being drawn towards the idea of reincarnation that gives a chance to each soul to mend its ways and ultimately to move towards salvation. The fourth view does not believe in the salvation of all beings, it holds that those who are not finally lost may be purged in purgatory —an intermediate place between heaven and hell — and made

fit for salvation. This is the Roman Catholic view, whereas the Protestant Church rejects the idea of purgatory.[3]

Catholic theologians hold that the sacraments are necessary for salvation: "Out of the Church there is no salvation." So, from this point of view, there is no hope even for the Protestants. Coming to Protestantism, we find that it stresses salvation by faith. Salvation is God's gift to man, and not a result of man's own merit. It comes through faith in Christ as the Saviour.

But, when we study Christian mysticism, we find the mystics place before us a deeper conception of salvation — as the mystics of other religions also do. This salvation is attained through the soul's union with the Divine Spirit.

Islamic View: According to the Islamic view, there is no salvation outside Islam. In the Koran, Mohammed describes heaven very attractively for the faithful:

> Amid gardens of delight shall they dwell who have feared God, rejoicing in what their Lord hath given them.

Mystics, however, do not take this description literally. The ideal of salvation held by the Sufi mystics is very different from the sensual salvation which appeals to the popular mind. To them, salvation can only be had through union with the Supreme Spirit.

Buddhist View: The Buddha speaks of Nirvana as the highest goal. Nirvana is cessation of false individuality, desire and suffering, and attainment of the transcendental state of consciousness. It is beyond all limitations and changes, beyond "Is" and "Is not", and so it is indescribable. Becoming one with this highest Intelligence or

3. Cf. *Man's Quest for Salvation*, Charles S. Braden, pp. 173-4.

Bodha, Gautama, the Prince, became Buddha, the Enlightened One. He could not express what is beyond relativity, but he showed the way leading to its attainment, by means of all-round disciplines.

This salvation is gained not through any outside help but through self-effort, on which the Buddha put the greatest stress:

> "Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Look not for refuge to any one except yourself. Work out your salvation with diligence."

In later Buddhism, salvation became more and more dependent upon taking refuge in the Buddha. Mahayana Buddhism introduced the Bodhisattva ideal. According to it, the one on the way to Buddhahood, instead of seeking his own salvation, helps others to gain salvation before he attains his. Thus, to the idea of salvation attainable through self-effort is added the doctrine of grace.

Hindu View: What is called Hinduism is not a stereotyped religion. It is not a kingdom but a commonwealth of faiths, all united by common spiritual bonds.

Whether non-dualistic, theistic or agnostic, all Hindu systems believe in the eternal nature and purity of the soul. According to almost all of them salvation is possible through selflessness, self-analysis and meditation.

There is the Samkhya agnostic. He has no place for a God in his system, but he believes that man is Spirit. That pure Spirit he calls Purusha. Through ignorance, this pure spirit becomes united with matter but, with the dawn of knowledge, the Spirit realizes its true nature, and is separated from matter for all times. This is the ideal of salvation held by the Samkhya philosophers.

But in the Yoga system of Pātanjali, we have the conception of God. God is not the Creator, but the Teacher of teachers. Yoga teachers concede that through worship of God as the Teacher of teachers and by repeating His Divine Name, the spiritual seeker may attain spiritual illumination about his own nature and about the nature of God. Salvation comes through self-knowledge.

Among the Hindus, there are several theistic schools. Those whom we call dualists believe that the soul is different from God, and all souls are different from one another, but all souls are controlled by the will of God. God is the one Master, and all souls are His servants. Salvation is attained through the realization of this relationship.

When we come to the system of what is called Qualified Non-dualism, we have a slightly different conception. Souls are eternal by nature but they are, as it were, a part of the infinite whole called Isvara. Isvara is the Soul of souls and much more. Just as we have our body, and our soul dwells in the body, so in this way of thinking, God — the Soul of all souls — connects us all, and the highest realization is to experience this intimate relationship between God and the soul, both of which are eternal.

According to Sri Ramanuja, the greatest exponent of this school of thought, God is like the substance and the soul is like the attribute. God is the Lord, and the soul is the dependent. The soul is, as it were, the body, and God is the Soul of all souls. The highest goal is attained when the spiritual seeker realizes his close relationship with God. The realized soul attains the nature of God, though not identity with Him. God is the embodiment of purity and love, and as the aspirant comes to possess more and more purity and love he is united with the Godhead.

There are other aspects of salvation which may be considered more human, according to which the devotee attains his goal after his death and dwells eternally with the Lord in the highest heaven, or again he may enjoy the nearness of the Deity, assuming a form similar to His special personal form, or even attaining divine attributes and powers, but not the power over the creation and dissolution of the world, which is possessed by the Lord alone. All these forms of salvation, in which the spiritual seeker shares the divine attributes and perfection, are grand, but they fall short of the highest spiritual ideal presented by Advaita Vedanta.

Non-dualistic Path to Salvation

The one Supreme Spirit is looked upon in many ways. He is regarded as Brahma, the Creator; as Vishnu, the Protector; as Siva, who takes this creation back to its cause; and as various other Divine Incarnations like Rama and Krishna. This is not polytheism as misunderstood by many; the same Divine Spirit lies behind all these aspects. Aspects may be many, but the Spirit is the same. A great Christian missionary who, unlike most of his colleagues, is sympathetic, declares:

> "All divinities down to the very lowest scale are manifestations, in some form, of God Supreme. Thus rightly considered, Hindu theology is as monotheistic as Christianity or Islam."[4]

The other aspect of Vedanta is the Non-dualistic one. As distinct from those forms of salvation in which the spiri-

4. *A Garland of Hindu Prayers*, Dr. Justin E. Abbot (Preface).

tual seeker, maintaining his spiritual individuality, feels the perfection of the Lord, there is another, the central theme of which is that the aspirant joins his soul with the Over-soul. Just as rivers flow towards the ocean and meet there, so also do the spiritual seekers meet the Infinite Spirit and become one with It. Such ideas are not strange to mystic Christianity or Islam. Thus St. John of the Cross declares: "Divine love makes the soul to be entirely assimilated to God." And a Sufi mystic says: "Whoever enters in the City of Love— God's love — finds room only for one."

Salvation — Partial and Complete

After having reached this union with the Supreme Spirit, most souls cannot return to the normal plane of consciousness; but fortunately there are some who, through the Divine Will, come down to our plane. It is they who bring to us the message of Divine Love, of Divine Unity. They bring to us the message not only of the Transcendental Reality, but also of the Immanent Reality.

In our modern world, such a personality was Sri Ramakrishna. Having attained the highest illumination, he came back through the Divine Will. The unity that he realized in the superconscious state, that unity he experienced shining in and through everything. The unity which the man of knowledge or the *Jnani* attains and in which he is lost, certainly brings about his salvation, but this salvation is partial in a sense. The salvation of one who has, on the other hand, realized both the Transcendent and the Immanent, and who is free on all planes of consciousness, is all comprehensive. This is the highest form of salvation, and one who attains it is a *Vijnani*. Ramakrishna tells us that the experience of the *Vijnani* is fuller and sweeter.

"It is a great joy to merge the mind in the Indivisible Brahman, in the Indivisible Supreme Spirit. But to the *Vijnani*, the man of sweeter realization, it is also a joy to keep the mind on the *Lila* or the relative aspect. He sees the same spirit shining in and through everything."[5]

Means to Attain Salvation

How can this complete salvation be realized? Let us listen to what the modern Vijnani, Sri Ramakrishna, tells us:

"The path of knowledge leads to Truth, as does the path that combines knowledge and love. The path of love, too, leads to this goal. The way of love is as true as the way of knowledge. All paths ultimately lead to the same Truth. But as long as God keeps the feeling of ego in us, it is easier to follow the path of love."[6]

The same idea we find in the Bhagavad Gita:

"The task of those whose minds are set on the Absolute is most difficult. Embodied beings find it hard to follow the path of the Absolute."[7]

What, then, should they do? Let them, Sri Krishna tells us, consecrate all their actions to Him, the Supreme Spirit. Let them regard Him as the ultimate goal. Let them worship Him, meditate on Him with single-minded concentration, and then they will attain the supreme realization.

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5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 435.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
7. *The Bhagavad Gita*, XII. 5.

Attaining Salvation in this very Life

Some spiritual seekers are not prepared to wait for their salvation until they die; they wish to experience it in this very life. They achieve their wish by realizing the Divine Reality shining in all hearts, through purifying themselves by their consecrated actions, prayers and meditations. Sri Krishna tells us that those who are free from all impurities, who have controlled their minds and have realized the Self, have attained freedom or salvation both here and hereafter. This is the complete ideal of salvation we have before us.

So, instead of seeking our salvation on the waking plane which is fleeting; or in the world of dreams and fancy which is passing, or on the plane of deep sleep, which is unconscious, let us try to seek it on the superconscious plane, on the plane of Divine Realization. Let us make ourselves fit for this complete salvation which is Self-Knowledge, which is Freedom, which is Bliss.

CHAPTER V

THE CONTROL OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

The Spiritual Birth

In order to attain the highest illumination we all have to pass through a second or spiritual birth. Through it we awaken to the consciousness that we are spiritual beings in our essential nature; that we, as spiritual beings, are all parts or modes or reflections of the Infinite Spirit. Hindu teachers call that the Sat-Chit-Ananda—Absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Others call it God, Supreme Spirit, Allah, Tao, the Over-Soul and so on.

As a result of steady spiritual practice, or even before we take to spiritual life, all of a sudden we may be raised to a higher spiritual plane of consciousness. This first spiritual awakening shows us to what heights we may rise, but not to what depths we may fall any time later. Our desires and passions are lying hidden deep in the subconscious mind. Unless they are controlled and transmitted, they may lead the soul to premature spiritual death. Of course, the spirit can never die; but, after a fall, the soul will have to begin its spiritual life over again, either in this life or in future life. Such sheer waste of time and energy should be avoided.

Instinct—the Memory of our past Experiences

Patanjali, the ancient teacher of Yoga, declares:

> Man is Spirit. He calls it Purusha ... a spiritual entity. Owing to ignorance, the Spirit identifies itself with the ego. Egotism, again, makes the soul subject to attachments and aversions; then comes the great clinging to life, with fear of death and the longing for self-preservation together with all the troubles consequent upon it.

He says in an aphorism—"Clinging to life is found in the learned as well as the ignorant." [1]

Swami Vivekananda comments on this as follows:

"This clinging to life you see manifested in every animal. . . . In India this has been one of the arguments to prove past experience and existence. For instance, if it be true that all our knowledge has come from experience, then it is sure that that which we never experienced we cannot imagine or understand. . . .What is instinct? . . .In the language of the Yogi, instinct is involved reason and gets to be automatic Samskaras. Therefore it is perfectly logical to think that all we call instinct in this world is simply involved reason. As reason cannot come without experience, all instinct is, therefore, the result of past experience. . . .The recurring experiences of various fears in course of time produce this clinging to life. . . .We have seen that it has become instinctive. In the psychological language of the Yoga it has become a Samskara. The Samskaras, fine and hidden, are sleeping in the Chitta. All these past experiences of death, all that which we call instinct, is experience become subconscious. It lives in the Chitta, and is not inactive, but is working underneath. The Chitta-Vrittis, the mind-wave which are gross, we can appreciate and feel; they can be more easily controlled, but what about the finer instincts?. . .

1. *Yoga Sutras*, II : 9.

These have to be controlled in the germ, the root, in their fine forms, before even we have become conscious that they are acting on us. With the vast majority of mankind the fine states of these passions are not even known—the states in which they emerge from sub-consciousness. When a bubble is rising from the bottom of the lake we do not see it, nor even when it is nearly come to the surface; it is only when it bursts and makes a ripple that we know it is there. We shall only be successful in grappling with the waves when we can get hold of them in their fine causes, and until we can get hold of them, and subdue them before they become gross, there is no hope of conquering any passion perfectly. To control our passions we have to control them at their very roots; then alone shall we be able to burn out their very seeds."[2]

In the above, Swami Vivekananda is giving us a glimpse into the Hindu system of psychology which we moderns also can apply with great profit.

Past Impressions can be Controlled

Freud, the founder of the modern psycho-analytic school, has done us a great service by his discovery of the importance of the sub-conscious and its dynamic influence on consciousness in relation to neurosis and mental troubles. Yet it is strange that he refused to believe that the ancient Hindu thinkers knew well of the workings of the sub-conscious mind. As a matter of fact the ancient Hindu knew much more than the modern Western psychologists.

At the very beginning of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali tells us that the Spirit is identified with the waves of the mind.

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2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, 239. Commentary on (II.9) of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

Mind is likened to a lake and this lake is breaking into waves. But how do these waves arise?

There is the outside object, from which some stimulus comes to the sense. Take, for instance, the eye. The stimulus is carried further to the optic centre which is the seat of the sense of vision. From there it goes to the mind. The mind takes it to the Lord of the mind. Then comes a reaction which is in the form of an idea. It is a wave. We are always identifying ourselves with such waves which we call thought, feeling and willing.

According to the teachers of Hindu psychology, thinking, feeling and willing are all like waves of the mental lake. There are no watertight compartments separating them; they all go together. Each wave contains varying degrees of all the three—thought, feeling and willing. The name is given according to the dominating element. When a wave touches the head more than the heart we call it a thought and when it touches the heart more than the head we call it a feeling. And when the wave, as it were, touches head and heart equally, we call it will, which expresses itself in action. With all these waves the soul is constantly identifying itself.

However, there are waves and waves. Some waves come from the upper layers of the mind, others from its depths, and these latter are more troublesome. Patanjali tells us how the Spirit remains always identified with the non-Spirit, absorbed in fancies, building castles in the air, living in a fool's paradise. He further says that this Spirit remains identified with false notions, taking the unreal to be real, identified with egotism, attachment, aversion, with voidness in sleep and clinging to life all the time. Thus identified with our own thoughts and feelings, however

correct and good these may be, we do not know what we are in our essential nature.

Ancient Spiritual Synthesis and Modern Psycho-Analysis

Swami Vivekananda condemned the scientific men of his day for holding that impressions or tendencies belong to the material, physical body alone. There was a time when "medical materialists," as William James called them, used to explain all emotions in terms of nerves and glands. They dismissed the superconscious states of the saints thus:

> Extraordinary conscientiousness is due to stimulated nerves. Melancholy is due to a torpid liver. The apostle St. Paul's vision on the road to Damascus was possible simply because he was an epileptic. St. Theresa, the Christian mystic, was a hysterical woman. George Fox's discontent with the shams of the world was a symptom of a disordered colon.[3]

But fortunately times have changed. We find how modern psychologists, especially after the discoveries of Freud, are revealing to us the ways in which the mind exerts influence on the body. Some remarkable examples may be cited.

A psychologist speaks of a lady who became a diabetic patient. She developed some pains which were diagnosed as diabetic neuritis. She was happily married and had two children. There was no special cause for worries, yet she was ill. Psycho-analysis revealed that she had a

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3. Abridged and adapted from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James. pp. 11 & 14.

deep-rooted hatred for her own mother — a tyrannical woman. She heaped a great deal of blame on her. As she relieved herself of her pent-up grievances to the psychologist, she began to feel better. Her stiffness left her and so did the pain. Through her treatment she learned that "annoyance, rage, and fear caused more sugar in her blood than potatoes, candy and ice-cream."[4]

There is another interesting illustration: it is about a prosperous businessman who developed a mild stomach trouble. The pain increased, and the doctor diagnosed an ulcer as the cause. Strangely enough, he felt the worst attacks in his own home; but when away on business trips he was almost free from pain. Eventually the doctors discovered that the cause of his trouble was his aggressive wife, who never allowed him to relax. He confessed, "Sometimes I get so mad at that woman that I have to get out for a while. But she adores me and there isn't anything I can do to change her." The doctor helped the man to realize that it was his own emotional conflict that created the illness and that it was he who had to change, not his wife. As his outlook altered, he became free from the ulcer.[5]

Now these illustrations have a great moral for us all who, in our own humble way, are trying to live the spiritual life. We ourselves must make a change while we want others to alter.

There is the story of a king who was suffering from jaundice. The doctor advised him to see only green things. The king ordered that the whole city should be painted

4. Abridged and adapted from *Mind and Body*. Flanders Dunbar. pp. 61-62.
5. *Ibid.*

green. The people did not know what to do. The Prime Minister told the king: "I have a better solution. Why don't you put on spectacles with green glasses?" By changing his glasses the king could see all things green.

By changing our own glasses, coloured by our own emotions, tainted by our mental troubles, we can see the world in a new light, and even attain peace and calmness thereby.

Man, a Mixture of Good and Evil

We must sublimate and purify all our various instincts, innate tendencies and habits. We have to give them a higher turn. Most of the Western psychologists speak of socializing the instincts. Hindu teachers also speak more or less in this strain, but they say something more. They say that there is in every being a conscious or subconscious urge for Ananda or bliss which usually takes a wrong direction towards sense enjoyment. Following the right course, the soul can undergo moral and spiritual disciplines, and thus attain its union with the Supreme Spirit, which means its highest fulfilment in the Bliss Supreme.

We have in us both wonderfully good things and awfully bad things. Those who say man is vile, man is a bundle of evil, are telling a half-truth, because man possesses good qualities along with the bad ones. Some of us may be selfish at times, but we also have the capacity to make sacrifice. Some of us may be very angry and egotistical, but again there are moments when we show great humility; we may be swayed by passions and yet on occasions show a great power of self-control. So we must take stock of the best as well as the worst in us, and then find ways and means to eliminate the

bad and strengthen the good. As we succeed in the purification of our emotions our soul moves towards Self-realization.

The Importance of Religion

Many times the question is asked, "Are psychiatrists against religion?" One of them answers, "Hardly. . . If you get comfort from prayer, continue to pray. But don't pray for a gift of a new set of automobile tyres. (This the psychiatrist wrote during the War when tyres were scarce!) Pray for an enlargement of your sense of decency and fair play. Pray for gentleness and appreciation of the integrity of personality to keep you from pushing other people around."[6]

Three Kinds of Troubles in Life

Generally, where do our troubles lie? The Vedanta tells us that our troubles lie within ourselves. No person can harm us or wrong us unless there is some trouble within ourselves.

There are three kinds of troubles because of which we suffer. First, it may be troubles caused by the elements—such as a storm, a heavy flood or a drought; secondly, there are the troubles caused by other human beings, and sometimes by animals; thirdly, troubles that arise within our body and mind. Obviously it is most important that we try to get rid of the troubles we cherish within our body and mind, both conscious and subconscious. With regard to the latter, we are seldom aware how deep-rooted our tendencies are. There

6. *Release from Nervous Tension.* David Harold Fink. p. 139.

is a story: A woman was bitten by a rabid dog and she developed hydrophobia. In the hospital, while she was still sane, the doctor told her, "I am giving you paper, pen and ink. Write your will." She began to write, and went on doing so for a long time. The doctor saw that she was writing a list. "What are you doing?" he asked, realizing that by now her mind was going. She replied, "I am making a list of those I'm going to bite." Some of us even on our death-bed may do the same thing, should we not be able first to dispose of those deepest, often unwelcome and unhealthy, thoughts and feelings we harbour within ourselves.

Control through Spiritual Practice

It is very difficult to get rid of deep-seated emotions such as anger, hatred, jealousy, love and fear, but Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, and Patanjali in the Yoga-Sutras tell us that through practice it is possible. In all the various forms of Yoga, the first emphasis is laid on moral practice. This means giving our tendencies a higher turn, especially our mental energies, in order not only to socialize them but also to spiritualize them. We must practise freedom from attachment, must maintain enthusiasm, work in a spirit of worship, try to be truthful and sincere and do good to others without the thought of return. We must not think vain thoughts but must learn how to stop the wanderings of our mind.

Along with the practice of moral virtues we must have spiritual disciplines too. Let us always remember the Supreme Spirit as we work. Let our hands be busy with work while we fill our mind and heart with divine thoughts. Let us pray for obtaining a better power of understanding.

Meditation—a great aid

The ideal in spiritual life is Self-realization. As a profound psychologist, Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

> "When a person is practising control, he naturally cuts himself off from outside objects; but the taste of subtle hankering within does not go. This subtle desire can go only with the attainment of self-realization."[7]

We have already known how, according to Patanjali, and later, Vivekananda, desires and passions are impediments in the path of Self-realization and should be controlled in the germ, the root in their finer forms. How are we to do that? Meditation becomes a great aid if we have already calmed our mind to some extent through moral practices and prayers. Through meditation, or control of the mind, we go to a great extent into the innermost recesses of the mind and there discover all the troubles that are lying concealed. Gradually we come to possess that introspection and power of self-analysis which enable us to find the subtlest forms of lurking troubles, desires, and tendencies. Having found them, we can disentangle ourselves from them as they become controlled and attenuated.

Psychologists too stress this point, but they stop half way. One should discover not only the hidden troubles within one's sub-conscious mind, but also their causes, and rid oneself of these. Swami Vivekananda says:

> "We become identified with our emotions, but when this inner vision, this introspection awakens in us, we discover our troubles in their subtlest form and, at the same time, we can say 'I am not my troubles; I am not

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7. *Bhagavad Gita*, 2 : 59.

my anger, I am separate from it,' and 'I am separate from these emotions and all these tendencies, I am a free soul.' "

By following the moral and spiritual path with earnestness and steadiness, one learns the secret of lighting the fire of Knowledge within oneself so that it may, sooner or later, burn away all wordly tendencies and desires. The spirit then shines forth in all its splendour, and we become free and blissful. We must undergo spiritual disciplines in a systematic way if we want to put an end to all our troubles, both conscious and sub-conscious, and attain true illumination and peace.

CHAPTER VI

INDIAN YOGA AND WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

More than half a century ago Swami Vivekananda realised the "Importance of Psychology" and has drawn, in a lecture with the same title, a comparison between the Western and Indian approaches to psychology, which he calls the "science of sciences". To quote the words of the Swami:

> "Psychology is the science of sciences; but in the West it is placed upon the same plane as all other sciences, that is, it is judged by the same criterion—utility.
>
> "How much practical benefit will it do to humanity? How much will it add to our rapidly growing happiness? How much will it detract from our rapidly increasing pain? Such is the criterion by which everything is judged in the West.
>
> "But even taking the Western idea of utility as a criterion by which to judge, psychology, by such a standard even, is the science of sciences. Why? We are all slaves to our senses, slaves to our own minds, conscious and subconscious.
>
> "Deep down in our subconscious mind are stored up all the thoughts and acts of the past, not only of this life, but of all other lives we have lived. This great, boundless ocean of subjective mind is full of all the thoughts and actions of the past. Each one of these is striving to be recognised, pushing outward for expression, surging, wave after wave, out upon the objective mind,

the conscious mind. These thoughts, this stored-up energy we take for natural desires, talents, etc. It is because we do not realise their true origin. We obey them blindly, unquestioningly and slavishly. The most helpless kind of slavery is the result, and we call ourselves free. Free!

"The ghosts of past thoughts, past lives hold us down; All the misery of the world is caused by this slavery to the senses. Our inability to rise above the sense-life—the striving for physical pleasures, is the cause of all the horrors and miseries in the world.

"It is the science of psychology that teaches us to hold in check the wild gyrations of the mind, place it under the control of the will, and thus free ourselves from its tyrannous mandates. Psychology is therefore the science of sciences without which all other sciences and all other knowledge are worthless.

"The mind, uncontrolled and unguided, will drag us down, down for ever—rend us, kill us; and the mind, controlled and guided will save us, free us. So it must be controlled, and psychology will teach us how to do it.

"Deep, deep within, is the soul, the essential man, the Atman. Turn the mind inward and become united to that, and from that standpoint of stability, the gyrations of the mind can be watched and facts observed, which are to be found in all persons. Such facts, such data, are to be found by those who go deep enough, and only by such.

"If you intend to study the mind, you must have systematic training; you must practise to bring the mind under your control, to attain to that consciousness from which you will be able to study the mind and remain unmoved by any of its wild gyrations."[1]

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, pp. 26-30.

Our modern world is full of stress and strain. Most of us are suffering from a mental fever which is increasing the number of mental cases everywhere. "More than half of the hospital beds of this country," says an eminent American doctor, "are filled with persons mentally ill."[2] As compared to those who are accommodated in the hospitals, there is an enormously large number of persons for whom beds are not available. This is true of all countries including India. In such a state the question arises — Can Hindu Yoga and Western Psycho-therapy help us and to what extent?

The System of Yoga

The word 'Yoga' has come to be associated with physical feats and psychic powers and phenomena. However, according to the ancient Yogic teacher Patanjali, the true meaning of Yoga is the cessation of all mental waves, as the result of which the spiritual seeker is established in his true Self.[3] In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna defines Yoga as "that state in which the mind is restrained by the practice of concentration, in which, seeing the Self by the Self, one enjoys transcendental bliss and remains unaffected even by the greatest pain."[4]

In a lunatic asylum one of the inmates was playing solitaire — a card game for one — and his friend was watching him. "Wait," interrupted his friend, "I have caught you cheating yourself. Don't you catch yourself cheating?" The man replied, "No, never. I am too clever."

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2. Dr. S. Bernard Wortis. Quoted by Herbert V. Prochnow in *The Public Speakers' Treasure Chest.*
3. *Yoga Sutras*, I : 2 & 3.
4. *The Bhagavad Gita*, VI : 23.

All of us are too clever like the mad man and are fooling ourselves in countless ways. The teacher of Yoga tells us that we are practising self-deception and running away from our true Self all the time. In the waking state we remain identified with various ever-changing experiences. In dream we remain absorbed in our dream world and its phenomena. In sleep we are lost in the state of unconsciousness. How often do we day-dream and live in the world of memory and fantasy? Our observation is faulty, information unreliable and conclusion wrong. We certainly need clear observation, reliable information, and accurate conclusion as a step towards realising our true Self.

Our True Self

What is our true Self? According to Yoga man is pure Spirit, but owing to ignorance he comes to be identified with the ego, mind, senses and body. Western psychology has not yet discovered the true Self of man, although it seems to be searching for it. Many modern psychologists speak of the "person in the body" meaning that a human being is "an integrated body-mind".

The Achievement of Western Psychology

We are thankful to these psychologists for having refuted the materialistic theory that man is a combination of cells and his mind is an epi-phenomenon. The materialistic thinkers hold that the highly organized brain secretes thoughts just as the liver secretes bile. The concept that man is a physico-psychical being is certainly an improvement over the old materialistic way of thinking.

Modern psychologists are revealing to us how we do not want to face the realities of life and are playing tricks with ourselves in various ways. When we are faced by our enemies in the form of anger, sex, fear, pride, jealousy, instead of fighting them we suppress or repress them. Consciously or unconsciously we drive them to the sub-conscious plane. We try to forget our troubles but they do not forget us. They go on working unperceived by us and produce neurosis and other ailments. The passionate man, the miser, the cruel person in us practises self-deception called rationalisation. We try somehow or other to justify our conduct by taking shelter under false reasoning which makes us look better than we are. We put on false reasoning glasses and see the world coloured by our own ideas projected on it. We try to avoid conflicts by taking refuge under self-deception in some form or other, become intellectually and emotionally confused and develop nervous and even mental illness.

All these forms of self-deception are like crutches and we want to use these under all circumstances. There is a story of a man who was injured in a street-car accident. He had to use crutches under the direction of his doctor. His lawyer filed a suit in the court against the company and the case was pending. After some weeks the doctor told him to dispense with the crutches. But still he continued to use his artificial support. A friend of his who met him after several weeks asked him, "Can't you give up the crutches now?" He replied, "My doctor says I can, but my lawyer says I can't!" The doctor in us wishes us to face the realities of life while the lawyer advises us to run away from them.

Some eminent psychologists observe—"There is one way of walking without crutches, walking mentally upright. It is called sublimation."[5] Sublimation means refining the crude instincts, raising lower impulses to higher personal and social levels, utilising them for the good of oneself and society. Most psychologists do not know how to go further than this and to suggest methods for spiritualising our instincts and impulses. However, we are grateful to them for all the help and relief they can render us on the psycho-physical level. Sometimes they effect remarkable cures to the great relief of their patients.

Sublimation

There are various schools of psycho-therapy based on different theories. Dr. Freud andh is school hold that sex-urge is the primary motive force of life. According to Dr. Adler, it is the will to power that drives man to action. Dr. Jung, on the other hand, holds that the basic energy is one and all-comprehensive, and it finds its expression through sex-instinct, will to power and other impulses. However, in their therapeutic method all of them teach us how to sublimate and socialise our instincts in some form or other, to look upon our problems and troubles in an objective way and find ways and means to solve them.

However, we must beware of certain class of psychologists who are becoming a menace to society. They think of man in terms of his lowest nature, associate his life too much with sex and give him the advice to express his instincts freely. Sometimes they advise their patients to forget their troubles which, driven from the conscious plane,

5. *Discovering Ourselves*, E.A. Streker and K.E. Appel, p. 377.

go on working and doing havoc in the subconscious. Further, very often they give the advice of getting married as if marriage is an all-heal panacea.

Speaking against such dangerous forms of advice, a great psychologist remarked that he had never known any case of neurosis being relieved or cured by libertinism, by giving oneself up to a wild, sensuous life. Referring to marriage he observed that half of his patients were neurotic because they were married, and the other half because they were not married.[6]

Marriage is a great institution and most persons need the disciplines and sacrifices of the married life. But those who are unmarried must also live a controlled, regulated life. This is the considered view of many wise psychologists, one of whom declares: "Sublimation is the lot of us all, nay our privilege. The object of all civilized life, married or unmarried, must be to find its sublimate interests."[7]

Western Psychology and Yoga

The psychologist's sublimation — socialising the instincts, looking at things objectively and living an intelligent life, being more or less adapted to one's own condition and environment — certainly gives an amount of mental balance, but from the Yogic point of view this is not enough. We need something more. Yoga, if we care to follow it, teaches us how to find a greater balance by living an ethical life which minimises our moral conflicts. Further, it shows us the way to co-ordinate our thinking, feeling and willing

6. *On Being a Real Person*, Harry Emerson Fosdick, p. 39.
7. *About Ourselves*, H.A. Overstreet, p. 249.

through the practice of meditation. Finally, it teaches us how to reach the super-conscious state in which our soul becomes integrated in the Oversoul or Supreme Spirit which is the Soul of all souls. It is then that we feel our unity with our fellow beings.

Western Psychology and Religion

Most psychologists do not care for religion but some others do recognise its value. "Religion is one of the best types of sublimation," says one. Referring to his teacher, Dr. Freud, who was sceptical about the role of religion, Dr. Jung observes:

> "Freud has unfortunately overlooked the fact that man has never yet been able single-handed to hold his own against the powers of darkness. . . .Man has always stood in need of the spiritual help which each individual's own religion held out to him. It is this that lifts him out of his distress."[8]

Freud evidently did not know anything of the psychology of Yoga and so, according to an interviewer, he refused to believe that the ancient Hindu teachers knew much about the unconscious mind and its functions.

During the early days of psycho-therapy most of the Western psychologists looked upon religion with suspicion and considered religious practices meaningless. However, in his Gifford lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1901-1902, later on published under the title *Varieties of Religious Experience,* Professor William James drew the attention of the Western world to the system of Yoga:

8. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul,* Dr. C.G. Jung, pp. 277-8.

> "In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of Yoga. Yoga means the experimental union of the individual with the Divine. It is based on persevering exercise and the diet, posture, breathing, intellectual concentration. . . . The Yogi who has by these means overcome the obscurations of his lower nature sufficiently, enters into the condition termed Samadhi."[9]

He quotes Swami Vivekananda from his Raja-Yoga: "The mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a super-conscious state. ...All the different steps in Yoga are intended to bring us scientifically to the super-conscious states of Samadhi." This is the common goal of all forms of Yoga as will be dicussed presently.

Illness Due to Suppression of Religious Emotion

It has already been observed that some thoughtful modern psychologists recognize the value of religion. One of them mentions a case which he considers very remarkable. An exceptionally brilliant lady was deeply religious and had close association with persons of a religious nature, with whom she used to perform religious practices regularly. Later on, she became a high executive in a company. Being deeply absorbed in her business, she lost all contact with her friends and had no time for the practice of devotion. Evidently there remained a subconscious conflict in her. After some time she started losing sleep and appetite and developed a kind of neurosis. She went to consult an eminent doctor. In his analysis of the patient, the introspective doctor found out that she was starving for lack of religious emotions, and accordingly advised her to re-

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9. *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, p. 391.

establish her contact with religiously-minded people and to pray etc. in her old way. Having followed the advice of the doctor, the lady regained her health perfectly within a short time. Speaking of her the doctor has remarked: "Ill health from emotional suppression does not always indicate that the suppressed emotions are of a sex nature. This is a case of the suppression of religious feeling."[10] In the course of our spiritual work in India and in the West we come across many such cases where the persons regain normal health and even improve in body and mind as the result of following moral and spiritual disciplines. Dr. Jung too speaks of the need of religions when he says:

> "Among all my patients in the second half of life, that is to say, over thirty-five, there has not been one whose problem, in the last resort, was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."[11]

The Paths of Yoga

Many of the modern Western psychologists speak of self-expression through social service. Teachers of Yoga recognise this fully, but they go further when they ask their students to give their tendencies a moral and spiritual turn. This is done equally in Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga.

In order to follow Karma Yoga the aspirant must try to be free from attachment and egotism. He must possess enthusiasm, evenness in success and failure and be inspired by the ideal of working in the spirit of worship. At first he offers the fruits of his labour to the Supreme Spirit, later

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10. *The Mind at Mischief*, William S. Sadler, pp. 75 & 76.
11. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 264.

on he feels the presence of the Divine within and works as a channel for the flow of Divine will and power, promoting the welfare of mankind.

The one who follows Bhakti Yoga should be endowed with the virtues of truthfulness, sincerity, and the spirit of doing good to others. He must also practise cheerfulness, avoid vain talk, repeat the Divine name and meditate on the Divine Spirit as the highest object of his love and devotion.

In the path of Jnana Yoga the spiritual seeker must possess very high qualifications: dispassion for all enjoyments here and hereafter, and discrimination between the real and the unreal. He must further practise control of the mind and the senses, withdrawal of the mind from all distractions, and also forbearance. Moreover he should develop a burning faith in the teachings he follows and an intense desire to be free from all bonds, and also practise meditation on the Supreme Spirit with one-pointed devotion.

The aspirant who follows the path of Raja Yoga must practise the preliminary disciplines of non-injury, truthfulness, non-covetousness, celibacy and non-dependence on others. Besides these he should acquire purity, contentment, austerity, capacity for deep study and the spirit of self-surrender to the Supreme Being as much as possible. He should next practise posture and breath-control (Pranayama). Detaching the mind from all things non-spiritual, he must try to be established in concentration and meditation.

In all these paths the first step is moral purification to be followed by the practice of meditation on the Supreme Spirit leading to the goal of Self-realisation. Speaking

of this common goal which apparently is taken to be somewhat different, Swami Vivekananda observes:

> "To the worker it is union between men and the whole humanity, to the mystic, between his lower and higher Self, to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love, and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence."[12]

Swami Vivekananda's ideal of Integrated Yoga

Swami Vivekananda places before us, further, the ideal of integrated Yoga combining all the elements of Yoga in our own lives:

> "Would to God that all men were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion, and work were equally present in full. . . .To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions, is my ideal of religion."[13]

If we can combine activity with meditation, and temper our devotion with knowledge, we can attain a remarkable integration of our thinking, feeling and willing. Yoga aims at even a higher integration through the practice of medistation. By rising to the spiritual plane of consciousnes and thinking oneself as a soul, let one meditate on the Over-Soul, the Supreme Spirit of which all souls are, as it were, parts. This meditation leads to the realisation of the Infinite Being, the true Self of man which appears as many. The illumined soul that feels its unity with all beings starts living a fuller life of consecration and service. Thus we see that if the western psychologists speak of self-

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 386
13. *Ibid.*

expresion through social service, Hindu spiritual teachers show their disciples the way to establish themselves in the highest spiritual ideal, to serve the God in man and try to transform this world into a veritable heaven as much as possible.

Yoga showing the way to Infinite Bliss

Owing to ignorance the soul feels itself separated from the Infinite Spirit, the Sat-Chit-Ananda — Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; but it yearns for Divine Union and Bliss all the time. In its search for pure bliss it follows wrong directions. It tries to find infinite happiness in the finite and is disappointed. Not satisfied with the enjoyment of sex, power, wealth and other worldly objects, it continues its striving and search. Here Yoga is of immense help in giving the soul proper direction and enabling it to discover abiding happiness in the realisation and service of the Supreme Spirit who dwells in the hearts of us all. In the words of the Bhagavad Gita: "The Yogi attains with ease Infinite Bliss of communion with the Supreme Spirit; he sees Him in all beings and all beings in Him; he worships the Supreme Spirit dwelling in all beings and enjoys abiding happiness in Him."[14]

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14. *The Bhagavad Gita*, VI: 28 & 29.

CHAPTER VII

DESTINY, HUMAN EFFORT, AND DIVINE GRACE

Are we at the mercy of Destiny?

One day when the Sultan was in his palace at Damascus, the handsome young man who was his favourite, rushed into his presence and in great agitation proclaimed that he must go to Baghdad at once. He begged to be allowed to take His Majesty's swiftest horse. The Sultan asked: "Why are you in such haste?" and the youth replied: "As I passed through the garden of the palace I saw Death, who stretched out his hands and frightened me. I must lose no time in escaping him." The favourite was allowed to take the horse he wanted, and after he had gone, the Sultan went into the garden. Death was still there. "Why do you threaten my favourite?" demanded the ruler. "I did not threaten him," Death replied, "I threw up my arms in surprise at seeing him here, for I have to meet him tonight in Baghdad." Is that the work of Destiny or Fate?

Many a time, as we run into reverses and struggles in the course of our spiritual pilgrimage, the question arises: Are we playthings in the hands of the forces of nature, or slaves of gods who preside over the affairs of the world? Or, are we helpless creatures lying at the mercy of some whimsical god who is believed to guide our destinies?

The Importance of Self-effort

Here is a selection of quotations from Hindu scriptures which stress the importance of self-effort in our spiritual life:

> "This Self cannot be attained by the weak, by the inattentive, nor by one who practises spiritual disciplines improperly. The wise who strive through proper means realize the Infinite Spirit."
>
> —*Mundaka Upanishad*

> "Know the Self to be the Master, sitting in the chariot of the body. Consider the intellect as the driver and the mind the reins. The senses are the horses and the sense-objects are the roads. The wise call the Self the enjoyer when He is identified with the body, the senses and the mind."
>
> —*Katha Upanishad*

> "The man who is always of unrestrained mind and is devoid of right understanding, has his senses uncontrollable like the unruly horses of a charioteer. But he who is always restrained in mind and has right understanding has his senses controlled like the good horses of a charioteer. He who has right understanding as his charioteer, and the mind as the well-controlled reins, reaches the highest goal, the realization of the all-pervading Spirit, his true Self, the Self of all."
>
> —*Katha Upanishad*

> "The stream of tendencies flowing through good and evil channels is to be directed by self-effort along the good path. When it has entered the evil path it is to be turned towards the good path."
>
> —*Muktikopanishad*

"Men obtain desired objects by personal effort. Those wanting in self-effort speak only of destiny. Neither the lazy nor those who depend solely on destiny reach their goal. Therefore, a person should, by all means, persist in self-effort."

—*Matsya Purana*

"Success of actions rests equally on destiny and one's efforts. Of these two, destiny is the expression of the efforts made in a previous life."

—*Yajnavalkya Smriti*

"A man should lift himself by his Higher Self. Let him not weaken this Self. The Higher Self is the friend, and the lower self the enemy of oneself. The self is the friend of him who has conquered the lower self by means of the Higher Self. But to him whose lower nature has not been conquered it behaves like a foe."

—*Bhagavad Gita*

"We are entitled to work, but never to the fruits of work. Do not work for the sake of the fruit nor allow yourself to be inclined towards inaction."

—*Bhagavad Gita*

"Surrendering all actions to the Supreme Spirit, fixing the mind on the indwelling Self, and abandoning all longings and selfishness, fight the battle of life without fear or excitement."

—*Bhagavad Gita*

"Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practise in the form of disciplines, do it as an offering to the Supreme Spirit. Thus shall you be free from the bondage of actions which bear good or evil results; with your mind firmly set on non-attachment, you will be freed from all bonds and reach the Supreme Spirit, your true Self, the abode of Supreme peace and bliss."

—*Bhagavad Gita*

A study of the above passages brings home to us that self-effort and self-surrender should go hand in hand. Both are to be regarded as expressions of Divine grace.

Fate and Free-will

While many thinkers believed in the absolute power of the forces of nature which were thought to control the destiny of man entirely, the Sophists of ancient Greece held that "man is the measure of all things," that he is not wholly a slave of the Fates but can shape his own destiny among his fellows.

Plato insisted upon freedom as a necessary basis for the good life. He would have men free to follow their passions, free also to control them and build a higher life by overcoming evil. Aristotle also believed in the freedom of man and held that morality was a matter of free choice—"Virtue as well as evil lies in our power." The Stoics, on the other hand, held that everything in the universe has its beginning and source in the will of God. Yet they gave man a degree of freedom to obey or disobey the moral law. Man may give himself up to his passions and become their slave, or he may conquer them and become free. The idea of the soul's freedom was also entertained by some of the early Christian thinkers. Others, such as St. Augustine, held that mankind was free with Adam but lost that freedom through Adam's sin. This is the doctrine of "original sin" by which Adam's sin was believed to have been transmitted to all his descendants. So man is a sinner by birth and can get his salvation only through Divine Grace. Those who will not accept the offer of grace through Jesus Christ are destined to suffer eternal punishment.

The Idea of Sin

When I went to Europe and studied the religious situation, I was very much struck by the discovery that the over-emphasis on the idea of sin, vicarious atonement and salvation through a particular prophet had, to a certain extent, taken away man's spiritual initiative. Men get into the way of thinking that because they are sinners, they are helpless.

Final illumination comes through the grace of God. Think of Light. Light is there and to the extent we become pure, to that extent light shines in us. There is too much talk of sin and hell-fire in some forms of institutional Christianity, and too little dwelling on the light. I do not blame young people for turning away from this type of religion. These days most people do not take seriously the ideas of heaven and hell. If the theory of predestination is true, there is little meaning in moral and spiritual initiative and effort.

Predestination

All popular conceptions of religion have some idea of an omnipotent Fate. But the central theme of absolute fatalism is that it assigns no place at all to individual initiative.

Very much akin to fatalism is this doctrine of predestination, which to some means "God's unchangeable decision from eternity of all that is to be." In this scheme, human life is reduced almost to a puppet show. However, as distinct from this school of thought, there are others who grant an amount of free-will to man and find this

freedom compatible with Divine omniscience and goodness.

I am reminded of a story about Lyman Beecher, a great New England leader in the field of religion in America. One Sunday he was to exchange pulpits with a neighbouring pastor who was a strict believer in predestination. On the Sunday the two men met mid-way. They were on horseback, each going towards the other's church. Said the second minister: "Dr. Beecher, before the creation of the world, God had arranged that you were to preach in my church and I in yours on this particular Sabbath." "Is that so?" replied Beecher. "Then I won't do it." And Dr. Beecher turned his horse and rode back to his own church! This is the right attitude we should all take. We should never allow ourselves to become automatons.

I have seen people hampered in life by false theology as well as by false astrology. People lose initiative by believing in astrological calculations, many of which in the long run prove to be wrong. Many blame the stars and planets and the signs of the zodiac, and hold them responsible for all their failures. "The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves," says Shakespeare. By removing the fault that is in ourselves we can change our destinies.

Determinism and Libertarianism

Coming to ethics, we find the school of Determinism, which holds that all moral choice is determined by previously existing mental, moral, physical or environmental causes. On this theory the agent cannot be held responsible for his actions.

Opposed to this view there are other doctrines like Voluntarism, Libertarianism, which hold that every human being is free to choose any course of conduct, irrespective of past or present conditions.

Both these extremes are contrary to facts. Man is limited by his heredity and environment as well as by his physical and mental conditions, his habits and tendencies, some of which, at least, he brings from a previous life. However, in the midst of his many limitations, man enjoys a certain degree of freedom. As we shall see later on, only by making the best use of this freedom can we obtain still greater freedom and bliss of illumination.

The Nature of Man

So much for destiny. Now what about ourselves? What are we? Let us try to understand something of th real man in us. There are various theories about the nature of man. The materialistic view is that man is nothing more than a combination of highly organized cells, his mind being only a byproduct of his brain. There is nothing permanent in him. He is born, assimilates food, grows to old age and dies; everything in him ends with death. If this be true, man is nothing more than a combination of cells and naturally a mere plaything in the hands of nature.

Similarly, a creature brought into being out of nothing, by an extra-cosmic God, is certainly at the mercy of his creator, who may send him to heaven, hell or purgatory, or annihilate him altogether by returning him to the nothingness out of which he was created.

If, on the other hand, man is a spirit, by becoming spiritually conscious he can control his destiny. The Upanishads teach that through ignorance man forgets, or

the soul forgets its divine nature, and by identifying itself with mind, senses and body, has become bound. We are born with all sorts of differences. Are we all born equal? Do we all have equal potentialities? Our differences lie in our bodies, our minds and memories. These are all quite distinct from the Spirit. Some scientists have tried to explain the differences in human beings in terms of cells and hereditary transmission, to ascribe all our habits, tendencies and ideas to our ancestors. This has proved a very unsatisfactory theory because an intelligent man cannot imagine that the genius of a Christ, a Buddha, a Shakespeare or a Mozart came from his ancestors.

Dissatisfied with this theory, a biologist formulated the hypothesis of the germ-plasm, which holds that habits and tendencies which do not exist in the parents appear in their descendants. These habits and tendencies lie in a potential state in the germ-plasm and each germ-plasm is to some extent different in its potentiality from others. If, "predisposition is pre-existent in the germ-plasm," then comes the great question which no scientist can answer: Where does this pre-disposition come from? A satisfactory answer is given only by those who believe in reincarnation.

Reincarnation

The soul is its own ancestor. The soul, with its past associations, tendencies and results of previous experiences, becomes associated with the body at birth. The Upanishads teach that the Self is the enjoyer when he is identified with the mind, the senses and the body. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna gives to the human soul a great dignity, by calling it an eternal portion of the Supreme Spirit. Individualized because of ignorance, it comes to

be identified with the mind and senses. This is the subtle body of man, and when it is separated from the physical body we call it death. But he who "dies" continues to be, and it is he who comes again. With all its coming and going, the Self, which is a part of the eternal Spirit, always continues to exist.

The Highest Goal of Human Life

The highest goal of man is to know himself, to know the Supreme Spirit from which he is inseparable. Owing to our ignorance and desires, we forget our true nature. We could become desireless if we could attain Self-knowledge, realize our spiritual consciousness and become free. Time and again Buddha said: "Man's misery is caused entirely by his desires."

It is the mind that is the cause of bondage or freedom. This is the main teaching of the Upanishads. The mind, attached to sense-objects, creates bondage. The mind, free from attachment, brings about the soul's freedom. There is no mystery about detachment. We can cultivate it as soon as we undergo systematic training.

Karma

Much of what has been wrought in the past can now be undone. Here comes in the Hindu law of Karma, the law of cause and effect, the law of Divine Justice. Karma does not mean fate. If the present is the result of the past, the future, in its turn, is the result of the present. We reap as we sow. This gives us great initiative for effort towards the good.

There is an old saying—

> "Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny."

It is through self-effort that destiny is made and can also be changed. It is a fact that, to a certain extent, we can undo what has been done. All Hindu spiritual teachers put great stress on self-effort, and when we come to the Buddha, we find him saying to his disciples:

> "Be lamps unto yourselves. . . . Do not depend on any external help. Rely on yourselves. The more you depend on yourself the more will your potentialities be realized."

Christ's teaching is not different when he says:

> "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

He meant that man should strive to the utmost to attain perfection.

> "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never attain the kingdom of God. . . . Ask and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you, for everyone that seeketh findeth."

Are we beginning to find an answer to the question: Are we at the mercy of destiny? We must accept what has been done in the past, but we can, at the same time, put forth fresh effort to counteract what has been done.

The need for Grace

We may at this point ask: Is self-effort everything? What is the place of grace in our spiritual life? Hindu

spiritual teachers are quite clear on this point. Sankara the great non-dualist, taught that it is by the great grace of God that we are born as human beings with spiritual yearning, and that the desire to be free and know God is a grace of God.

Grace comes to us also in the form of self-effort. While many allow themselves to be swept along by their passions and the force of circumstances, there are sturdy souls who attain extraordinary achievements in spiritual life. This power of self-effort is a mark of Divine grace. It is a fundamental rule of spiritual life that all forms of striving must be made in a spirit of detachment and self-dedication to the Supreme Spirit, of which the individual is a part. We find this idea stressed by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita and also in Patanjali's system of Yoga. Self-effort or the practice of spiritual disciplines is to be done in a spirit of self-surrender to the Supreme Being.

Persistent striving

To the extent we strive, to that extent is the barrier between the individual and the universal removed. Human evolution can be compared to an irrigation system; a farmer removes the obstacles from a water source so that it runs through the field by its own nature. Swami Brahmananda, quoting his Master Sri Ramakrishna, used to give us the illustration of a calf which tries to walk. At first its legs are weak and wobbly and it keeps falling down, but ultimately it succeeds in learning to walk, because that is its nature. What is happening here? By striving, the barriers are removed and more and more energy flows into our minds and spirits from the cosmic source.

Suffering and Spiritual yearning

There is first the yearning to be free, to be in tune with the Supreme Spirit. In the life of Tolstoi, we read about the period of torture he passed through when he felt that something had broken within him, something upon which his life had always rested. Suddenly there seemed nothing to hold on to and he felt that morally his life had stopped. During the course of a year he kept on asking himself whether he might not end his life. He thought of various means—a rope or a bullet — but all this time he was beset with a yearning which he called the thirst for God. He tells us in his autobiography how, all at once, he heard a voice within, which said: "He is here, within—He without whom one cannot live. To acknowledge God and to live are one and the same thing. God is what life is. Accept God and live."

Discussing this experience, Tolstoi says:

> "After this, things cleared up within me, and the light has never wholly died away. I was saved from suicide. Just how or when the change took place I do not know, but, as insensibly and gradually as the force of life had been annulled within me, and I had reached my moral death-bed, just as gradually and imperceptibly did the energy of life come back."[1]

At about the same period, Devendranath, father of Rabindranath Tagore the poet, was passing through a spell of great depression and indifference to the world. One day a page from a Sanskrit book fluttered past him. He picked it up and found that it was a leaf torn from one of the Upanishads. A Sanskrit scholar translated the first

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1. Quoted by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 182.

verse for him: "Our whole universe is permeated by the Spirit. Receive Him by renouncing all desire for worldly pleasure. Take delight in Him alone." A tremendous change came over him, and his misery fell from him all at once. In his autobiography we read:

> "When I learned the explanation, nectar from paradise streamed upon me. I had been eager to receive sympathetic response from men; now a divine voice had descended from heaven to respond to my heart of hearts, and my longing was satisfied. Could men give any such response? The very mercy of God Himself descended into my heart. My faith in God took deep root; in lieu of worldly pleasure I tasted henceforth divine joy."[2]

Coming to Sri Ramakrishna, we find that he also suffered, but not in the form of repentance for an ungodly life, or any great bereavement. The great sorrow of his heart was that he knew he had not yet realized the Supreme Spirit, the Divine Mother, whom he worshipped. He could not believe in God in any superficial way. God, to him, was a reality. His great yearning was to realize the Supreme Spirit of the universe, and until he did this his soul knew no peace. To him also came thoughts of putting an end to his life. Days and months he passed in meditation and worship until, at last, the outer world was lost. Doors, windows, the temple itself—all seemed to vanish, and he saw the ocean of life, the infinite ocean of the Spirit in which he was engulfed in an ineffable joy; he felt the actual presence of the Divine Mother and with it an infinite bliss.

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2. *Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore.* English translation. Quoted by James Bisett Pratt, ph.D. in *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 136-7.

Divine Realization

The experience of Divine realization can bring about a tremendous change in our whole nature and destiny. To attain it, in addition to great yearning in our hearts, we must possess the willingness to undergo spiritual disciplines and perform all our duties in a spirit of detachment and consecration. Divine grace comes to one who longs for it.

Our great teacher, Swami Brahmananda, used to remind us of a saying of his Master Sri Ramakrishna—

> "The breeze of Divine Grace is always blowing. Unfurl your sails."

It is spiritual striving that helps us to unfurl our sails. And then the Divine grace and power will blow upon us. Let us recall the Swami's admonition:

> "Be self-reliant. Effort is indispensable to success in spiritual life. How blessed is this human birth! Through it man can find God. To realize God must be man's chief purpose in life. Strive hard to reach Him and be free in this very life."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HYGIENE OF A PEACEFUL MIND

Increasing mental tension: Danger-signal of the day

Today modern science and technology have minimized distances and have brought races and peoples together as they had never been before. Conflicts and clashes in the world seem to be on the increase, and on account of the breakdown of physical barriers, disturbances among the people of one country or continent quickly affect even those living thousands of miles away. They are creating all over the world a tension, or rather a hyper-tension, which has been called more deadly than cancer. This threatens to ruin the physical and mental health of an incresing number of people all over the globe.

Speaking from his experiences in the United States, an American doctor once pointed out that one out of every twenty persons goes to a mental hospital sooner or later in his life. Besides general hospitals, there are many special hospitals for the mentally ill. The demand seems to be on the increase.[1]

I am reminded of the story about Dr. Johnson who, when he was courting Mrs. Porter whom he afterwards married, said to her one day: "My dear, I am of mean extraction, I have no money, and one of my uncles was

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1. Dr. S. Bernard Wortis. Quoted by Herbert V. Prochnow in *The Public Speaker's Treasure Chest*, p. 25.

hanged." To this the lady replied: "I have no money either, and if none of my relatives was hanged, I know there are fifty of them who deserve to be!" Even so, not all the mentally disturbed are shut up in hospitals; there are many more at large. The brand of lunacy is no doubt a terrible thing, and there is rather a panic about it in the world; but it is quite possible to overcome our mental mal-adjustments by taking proper care in time.

Want of proper knowledge — A potent cause

A certain amount of nervous tension may be necessary if we are to accomplish anything in life; we should make the best use of even our neurotic trends and the nervous tensions so that they may ultimately help us to be of greater service. But want of this knowledge is steadily swelling the number of emotionally unstable persons in our crazy contemporary society. The reason for this increasing mental illness is given by a practising psychiatrist as the inability to relax which is "one of the most wide-spread diseases of our civilization, and one of the most infrequently recognized."[2] The air around us is full of vibrations harmful to body, nerves and mind. It is very fortunate that the necessity for mental treatment through the practice of relaxation is being recognized more and more by many doctors and psychiatrists, some of whom are even coming to appreciate the value of meditation. Each one of us in his own way should practise some form of meditation, for in the words of Dr. Austen Fox Rigs, "meditation holds refreshment and rest, conserves energy for future needs, and helps to

2. Dr. Flanders Dunbar, *Mind and Body*, p. 138.

keep life balanced and elastic."[3] The doctor, however, uses the word meditation in various senses. It is concentrating the mind either on the form and nature of beauty, or on the meaning of truth, or on the spirit of courage, or on the future of human race and its civilization. It may be, again, concentration on the implications of immortality. It may even be on the eternal truths of religion. He has given hints to the process and aim of meditation in the words:

> "To start the process of meditation one needs only to 'move the mind off' on the right track. The preliminary direction should aim the mind upward and outward in the direction of the universal and impersonal, rather than downward and inward toward the specific ego-centric."

The doctor concludes his commendable advice by saying:

> "Once having given the stream of thought its direction, go with the current and let it take you wherever it will. Simply become a spectator."

Instructions for quieting the mind

But it is the most difficult of all things—this control and concentration of the restless mind. I remember how one of us, in his student days, went to Swami Brahmananda, and asked: "My mind is still restless. How can I calm it? With all my struggles I seem to make no progress. It all seems unreal." The Swami replied:

> "There is no cause for distress. The effect of meditation is inevitable, and if you practise Japa with devotion you are bound to get results. If you continue regularly to practise a simple form of meditation, repeating the divine name, you will surely find peace. In the primary stages

3. Austen Fox Rigs, *The Reader's Digest*, January, 1946.

meditation is like waging a war with your mind. It takes a mighty effort to bring the restless mind under control and place it at the feet of the Lord. In the beginning take care that while you meditate you do not overtax your brain. Intensify your effort gradually and you will find that through regular practice the mind becomes steady, and you will no longer feel any strain even if you sit still for long hours in contemplation. Your health will improve, and you will find yourself as refreshed in body and mind as you feel after deep sleep. After a while there comes an intense experience of happiness. When the body is disturbed, the mind also becomes disturbed. Therefore, particular care must be given to diet in order to keep the body healthy. Meditation requires mental concentration and, if you eat too much, the mind becomes sluggish. Passions must be kept under control if the mind is to remain steady. ... Unless you meditate, the mind cannot be controlled, and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate. If you think, 'First let me learn how to control my mind, and then I shall meditate,' you will miss the path of spiritual life. You must learn to do both at the same time — steady your mind and meditate."

Remember what Jesus said — that the pure in heart shall see God. This is the eternal mystical statement that the Divine Reality is not something far off but manifest in us as the Soul of our souls. He is always close and, when our minds become pure, then the Divine Reality is reflected in us. That is the true meaning of God-realization, and the quiet and peace that comes to the man of illumination is that peace of God 'which passeth all understanding'.

What is the Mind?

But what is the Mind? As we have mentioned before, there was a time when most Western scientists, who were

also materialists, held that the mind was an epi-phenomenon, a product of matter, a motion in the brain, and that brain secretes thought even as the liver secretes bile.

In his *Varieties of Religious Experience* Professor William James criticizes the medical materialists who tried to explain away all physical and religious phenomena as due to the morbid condition of the bodily organs, glands and nerves, in the words:

> "Scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions are; and if we only know the facts intimately enough, we should doubtless see 'the liver' determining the dicta of the sturdy atheist as decisively as it does those of the Methodist under conviction anxious about his soul. ...To plead the organic causation of a religious state of mind, then, in refutation of its claim to possess superior spiritual value, is quite illogical and arbitrary. ..."[4]

Modern psychologists with their stress on the influence of mind over the body have disproved the medical materialism which held that the mind was merely a by-product of the brain. The human personality is not a body plus mind, but an integrated body-mind. "Your mind is your body and vice-versa," says one psychologist. Patients who are satisfied with this theory of an integrated body-mind personality sometimes receive wonderful cures through psychosomatic treatment. (*Psyche* means mind or soul and *Soma* means body.)

Think four yourself and be cured

In her admirable book *Mind and Body,* Dr. Flanders Dunbar describes the case of a thirty-nine-year-old woman

4. p. 15.

who had been an invalid for eighteen years just after her marriage. All this time she suffered from stomach and heart troubles, pains all over, dizziness and general weakness. She tried to find relief successively, though not successfully, by various means. Finally psychological analysis revealed that she cherished a deep resentment against her parents whom she had to help and also against her elder sister who shirked her share of the family responsibility. Then she married a man whom she was not sure she loved and whom she considered her inferior. The coming of a child had no therapeutic effect, and she continued to be ill. The psychologist who treated her helped her to see the connection between her psychic and somatic symptoms, to discover how her repressed rages brought on her invalidism. She now became able to think clearly and adjust her life on a healthy basis. She was really cured, and she acquired as steady a balance of mind as can be expected of any human beings. [5]

Spiritual outlook essential

But there are many cases where a spiritual outlook is essential for healing. In our spiritual field we find many and various causes of tension. There is a tension that can be traced to emotional starvation of a spiritual nature. Years ago, a woman, the mother of five children, came to me. "Swami, I am going to pieces," she said. I urged her to practise a little meditation, to put herself in contact with a wider existence, for I was sure that such a practice would make her feel better and enable her to perform her household duties in a happier spirit. She said she had no

5. Pp. 49-52.

time. I advised her to take a few minutes for meditation each morning before she left her room: "Start each day with a calm mind and you will see a miracle." A year later when I visited the family, her husband said, "Swami, whatever you gave her certainly worked wonderfully well." She had become a better wife and mother, a better person altogether who had acquired a remarkable inner poise and balance. If a person begins with a spiritual outlook and is hungry for some higher emotion, he will find his own satisfaction in a way that no psychologist can ever give him.

There was another case of a woman who told me she felt out of tune with everything. She was a married woman with a fine husband, plenty of money and a good home, but she was losing all interest in life. She was taken to a prominent psychologist in Switzerland. Somehow she began to write a book about her inner striving for peace. The psychologist urged her to complete the work, saying that it was her unconscious that was expressing itself. What she really needed was a spiritual life in which she could manifest her energy; and with a minimum of spiritual instruction she made remarkable progress.

Mending broken souls

We are grateful to the psychologists, who, even without a spiritual outlook, are able to alleviate human sufferings; but a great many of the problems with which they deal are really religious or spiritual — a fact admitted by the eminent Dr. Jung himself. It is a happy thing that some persons can be helped to live a physically and mentally healthy life without any religious outlook in life, but this is only an egocentric stability without a sound foundation and may not last. Years ago Dr. Jung suggested

that psychologists and clergymen should join hands in alleviating human suffering. The *American Magazine* of October, 1947, published an article describing a remarkable clinic of this kind designed to mend broken souls and restore shattered faith.

A thirty-four-year-old woman came to this clinic. She looked like a woman of fifty and had for months suffered from insomnia, nervousness and chronic fatigue. She had consulted doctors, but to no avail. Religious at heart, she tried to pray but without success. She finally became so depressed that she wanted to commit suicide. The clinic psychiatrist discovered the real cause of her illness: for several years she had been harbouring a deep resentment towards her sister who had married the man she herself wanted to marry. Outwardly she was kind to her sister, but deep in her subconscious mind she cherished a terrible hatred which ruined her mental and physical health. Then a minister came to her aid: "You know it is evil to hate. You must ask God to help you forgive your sister in your heart; then God will give you peace." She followed this advice. "Through prayer and faith in a power greater than herself she has been able to forgive her sister. Her depression and insomnia are gone. She is a new person and happier than ever before."

Purity of character — the basic need

These instances are cited to show that in order to meditate successfully, one must be able to pray successfully. What deep psychology lies behind Jesus' words: "If thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then

come and offer thy gift." Prayer is not efficacious so long as the mind is disturbed by unspiritual feelings.

It all comes back to purity and single-mindedness. Many a time when students told us that nothing came of their prayers and meditation we would find that this was so because their minds had not yet attained even the minimum purification. It must be remembered that without purification it is impossible to have good meditation or prayer. Without purification no prayer or meditation will bring us in touch with the Cosmic Spirit with which we want to be in tune.

Hindu view of mind and its control

Instead of looking upon human personality as an integrated body-mind, the Hindu considers the body as merely the abode of the Self, or the instrument of the Self, just as the eye is the instrument of seeing, the nose of smelling, and the ear of hearing. "He who knows is the Self, the mind is the divine eye,"—the instrument of knowledge. The human personality is a complex. Man in his essential nature is a Self-conscious spiritual entity, an eternal portion of the Supreme Spirit. This individual soul or Jivatma is clothed in a subtle body consisting of mind and senses and also a gross physical body, but the Supreme Soul or *Paramatma* is different from both.

Mind is subtle matter in a state of vibration. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Arjuna complains that the mind is restless, turbulent, powerful and obstinate, and so to control it is as hard as to control the wind. Sri Krishna replies that doubtless the mind is restless and hard to control, but it

can be brought under control by constant practice, and the key to it is the exercise of dispassion.[6]

The body may be likened to a whirlpool and the mind to a whirlwind; or, as Patanjali puts it, a lake bursting into waves when we would have it calm. An outside object or emotion provides a stimulus to the external organs; these in turn affect the internal organs and the inner self. Then comes the reaction in the form of a wave. Thought, feeling and willing are inseparable. Each wave contains more or less all these three factors. Its nature is determined by the dominating factor. If the wave strikes the head more strongly, thought results; if it beats against the heart, feeling. In willing, the reaction is more or less balanced between the two. The soul — the indweller of the mind — is constantly being hidden behind these waves of thought, feeling and willing. Certain modern psychologists are discovering that the troubles of their patients are usually due to identification with these waves; but most of them still take their stand on the mind itself, regarding it as a self-conscious entity.

Hindu thinkers, on the other hand, take their stand on spiritual consciousness. To them even the mind itself is a sheath which covers the soul, or a garment which the soul puts on. In the unillumined state the spirit becomes identified with various conscious and unconscious impressions that make the mental lake impure and disturbed. The soul is constantly identified with the restless waves. In our waking state these waves are rising all the time. In the world of fancy, too, we become identified with them through emotion and memory. To get disentangled from

6. *Bhagavad Gita*, VI : 34 & 35.

all this, so that we can find out and become what we really are, is a tremendous task.

Sometimes the mind may be inert due perhaps to lowered vitality, but most of the time the mind is like a monkey, always running and jumping and rushing madly after something new. Swami Vivekananda has said that the human mind is like a monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy of the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself all-important. How hard to control such a mind! We must rid ourselves of this intoxication, this poison and this demon.

Stop wasting mental energy

Again, the mind may be likened to a rogue elephant which runs amuck, or to a packet of mustard seeds which is broken and scattered all over the floor. It may also be compared to rays of light that are dissipated in various directions without being focussed. A great amount of mental energy is being wasted every moment of the day and night. Sometimes, when we complain that we have no energy, it is because we have been wasteful of our mental energy through random thinking and through wandering of the mind, conscious and sub-conscious. Unless we learn how to canalise it usefully by means of some discipline such as meditation, mental energy is bound to be constantly wasted, with the consequent loss of both power and peace.

People are very careful as regards the use of their money and yet very careless about the use of their mental powers, which they are constantly wasting.

Totapuri, a sage who taught Sri Ramakrishna, used to warn him against wasting his mental powers: "Don't give your mind away. Keep it with you, and under control."

There is the old story of the sick wife whose husband took her to a psychiatrist. "Her mind is completely gone," said the doctor. "I'm not surprised at that," the husband remarked, "she has been giving away a bit of her mind every day all these twenty years!"

That is happening to us all the time: we are throwing away our mental powers. We waste our mental powers so constantly that it is a wonder we are not all in asylums. It is time more of us began to recognise this waste and loss, this misdirection of energy. We must find ways to stop it as we would stop up rat-holes that drain away all the water from irrigated fields; and we must give our mental energies a spiritual direction.

Rowing the anchored boat

The first step in all spiritual practice designed to stop this waste is the exercise of dispassion. We have to remember the woman who could not pray because her mind was tied to the hatred of her sister, and was like an anchored boat.

Once a party of drunkards decided to take a boat ride. Happily drunk, they got into a boat and rowed the whole night through until their intoxication wore off. Then, in the light of the dawn, they found they were in the same place. They had not moved an inch for they had forgotten to raise the anchor! Similarly, without moral culture no spiritual practice can help us to make any progress. So, before a teacher of Yoga gives any instructions in posture,

breathing exercises or forms of meditation, he stresses the necessity of attaining at least a minimum of mental purification or cleansing, which is termed sublimation in psychology and called purgation by mystics.

The true peace we should seek

Only after this essential initial step should we follow the various forms of spiritual practice, and this will, in proper time, lead to the realization of Supreme Reality and attainment of a balance and poise which nothing in the world can disturb. What we need is not the quietness of a lamb, or of a child, or of a man asleep or dead. Nor should we aspire to the quiet of an egocentric person who may be to some extent balanced and controlled, but whose balance is insecure and may at any moment be overthrown. We need the quiet mind of an illumined soul who has come in touch with the Infinite Consciousness, in touch with the boundless ocean rather than staying, as it were, in a little pool of stagnant water. An elephant walking into a little pool of water will create a great disturbance and make it overflow, but this will not happen if it walks into the ocean. The man of illumination who has learned how to unite his little consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness becomes like an ocean. Even in the midst of intense activity or turmoil, such a man can remain quiet and serene, and in control of the situation. All great spiritual teachers lead lives of intense concentration and canalisation of energy, maintaining an undisturbed poise.

If a buoy is tied to a small anchor the rope may break in tempest, the anchor be lost, and the buoy go astray. But if it is fastened with a strong cable to a heavy anchor, it

floats safely on the waves even in a storm. In some such way we can stay anchored to the Cosmic Spirit from which we can be inseparable, if we will but make the effort. Let our peace be the deep peace of divine purity and divine realization!

CHAPTER IX

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN RELIGIOUS LIFE—I

What are the 'obstacles'

In spiritual life, we use the word 'obstacles' with reference to both the inner and the outer world, to physical and subtle objects, and to conditions and situations which stand in the way of our spiritual progress.

In general, there are obstacles of various kinds producing misery or *Duhkha* of various types. In the *Samkhya Sutras,* Kapila mentions Duhkhas of three types: *Adhyatmika* or that caused within ourselves—in the body by illness and unhealthy living, and in the mind by evil desires, anger, greed, folly, pride, envy, etc.; *Adhibhautika* or that caused by other living beings such as beasts, thieves and evil-minded persons; and *Adhidaivika* or the misery brought about by natural phenomena such as extremes of temperature, floods, and storms, earthquakes, pestilences, etc. These may act as hindrances to spiritual life. And we are affected by outer troubles all the more when we are not well inwardly.

We are all born with subtle impressions and tendencies brought from previous lives and we also acquire new ones in our present life. While good tendencies help, evil ones obstruct our spiritual progress.

There are different kinds of obstacles and we come across them in the different stages of our spiritual life. Spiritual life is like a stream and should move towards the ocean of

Sat-Chit-Ananda or Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, call it Godhead, Brahman, the Lord, Allah, or Tao, as you please. Sometimes the spiritual current does not move at all; sometimes it moves for a time and stops; sometimes it tends to move along wrong directions. The task in our spiritual life is to make this current move, move in the right direction and move steadily till the goal is reached.

Obstacles are inevitable but can be overcome

That is the ideal. But in actual life, there is no such thing as movement in a straight line. There are ups and downs, breaks or stops, in the movement. Obstacles continue to confront us till we have known God's grace and attained the peace and blessedness that comes out of divine realization. Until then, however, we have to persist steadily in our spiritual practices; we have to continue the struggle however insurmountable the obstacles may seem for the time being.

This is a matter of actual experience for many spiritual aspirants. A young man was once asked about his spiritual progress by Swami Brahmananda, his teacher. He said, "Not very well, Maharaj; my mind is restless. I have no taste for spiritual practices yet. There seems to be an obstacle inside me. I feel so unhappy. I must have been born with evil tendencies and these stand in the way of my spiritual progress." To this the Swami replied:

> "My boy, you must not talk like that. Try to practise Japa at dead of night; if that is not possible, do it during the early hours of the morning. Waste no more

of your valuable time. Lose yourself in prayer and meditation; otherwise, how can the door to spiritual truth be opened?. ...The aspirant should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul and then follow it methodically. If he proceeds haphazardly he cannot make much progress, and if he gives up entirely, the effort to begin again will be twice as difficult. But no effort is wasted. Lust, greed, anger, all gradually leave a man who practises spiritual disciplines."[1]

When the young man said, "My mind is restless," he was not speaking of ordinary restlessness and unhappiness. Having made some substantial progress in spiritual life, he found inner obstacles standing in the way and these were making further advance difficult. The question may be asked, how do I know the mind of the young man. I know it because the young man was none other than myself!

There is restlessness and restlessness—that of the worldly man hankering for the pleasures of the world; and of the spiritual seeker yearning for progress, wanting to move from a lower plane of consciousness to a higher one.

Spiritual life is a twofold movement, one of which may be represented as the vertical and the other as the horizontal. We have to rise higher and higher and also expand more and more in our consciousness.

Most of us may not care to rise to a higher plane. We fool ourselves by thinking that we are all right where we are. We are like Plato's men in the cave who took the shadows to be real and were quite satisfied with the life of darkness they lived. We are quite contented with our life in the cellar.

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1. *The Eternal Companion: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, p. 145.

But some of us want to come out into the light and rise to a higher plane with the help of the spiritual current which may be likened to the elevator or lift which takes people from one floor to another. The spiritual current, when properly roused, takes us up from one centre of consciousness, or *Chakra,* to another. Sometimes we want to get into the elevator but the door does not open; this is one kind of obstacle. The door opens and we get into the box but the box does not move—this is another kind of obstacle. A third one is when we move up but find that the door does not open. The fourth is the door opens, we get out into the floor, move about for a time, but are unable to find our way back to the elevator when we want to rise higher. Something of this kind happened to me when I spoke to Swami Brahmananda of some obstacles standing in the way of my spiritual progress.

But these obstacles can be overcome. We can undergo spiritual practices, unfold the inner eye, discover the "Secret Stairs" and move up higher and higher.

Co-existence of obstacles and helps

Let us not, however, imagine that life is only full of obstacles. If we come across many obstacles and hindrances, we get also much help and aid both within us and without. It is essential that we have a correct idea, a balanced estimate, of our conditions and environments.

Never should we weaken ourselves by thinking too much of our shortcomings only. If we have evil tendencies, we also have good ones—even more than evil. If we have within us such enemies of spiritual life as egotism, sensuality, greed and anger, we have also such friends as selflessness, self-control, charity and compassion.

A great help to our moral and spiritual life is the remembering of the supreme truth that we are the Atman. We are the souls eternally in touch with the Over-Soul, just as a wave is in constant touch with, and is supported by, the ocean, just as a ray of light is in touch with the infinite light.

And we must beware of morbid theologians who think only in terms of sin, who always speak of man as a bundle of sins.

All our spiritual teachers tell us that there are two opposite types of ideas working in our lives, the good and the pleasant—*Sreyas* and *Preyas*. We find in the *Katha Upanishad:*

> "The good is one thing; the pleasant another. Both these, serving different needs, present themselves to man. It goes well with him who, of the two, takes the good; but he who chooses the pleasant misses the end. ...Both the good and the pleasant come to man. The calm one examines them well and discriminates. He prefers the good to the pleasant but the fool chooses the pleasant out of greed and avarice."

Maya, the power that has projected this phenomenal world, itself has two aspects, *Vidya* and *Avidya*, which may be compared to the centripetal and centrifugal forces. Vidya is that current which leads us Godward; it manifests itself as discrimination, non-attachment, devotion and love for God. Avidya leads us to worldliness and expresses itself as the various passions—desire for wealth, worldly ambition, work with attachment, cruelty, etc. Avidya darkens the understanding and binds the soul. Vidya tends to help man towards Self-realization and freedom. Let us choose the path of good and become purer in body and mind. This purity is essential for our spiritual growth and brings us in

touch with the cosmic spiritual forces which the devotee calls the grace of God.

Conditions for spiritual unfoldment

It is necessary for us to have a clear conception of spiritual unfoldment and its relation to cosmic existence and cosmic forces. Let us try to understand its secret through the illustration of a seed.

If the seed is planted in the proper bed and is kept in touch with nature—with earth, water, heat, air and space—it grows into a plant and finally develops into a mighty tree. The seed must be kept in close touch with nature and also in the proper condition internally, for only then can it profit by earth, water, etc.

The microcosm develops properly when it is in tune with the macrocosm. This is true in spiritual life also. The individual must be in tune with the cosmic.

If we look within ourselves, we find that our body is a part of the ocean of matter and that cosmic energy is flowing through it and sustaining it. Our individual mind is a part of the Cosmic Mind, and our individual soul is a part of the Cosmic Soul. In order to keep the body in good health, we must follow the physical laws. When the body is kept in a good condition, it remains in touch with the cosmic forces, which again help the body to maintain good health. To keep the mind in good health, we must follow the moral laws which stand for purity and harmony. This keeps the mind in contact with the Cosmic Mind and so in good health. Similarly our soul must also be in a fit condition, in a state of purity and harmony so that it may remain in direct touch with the cosmic spiritual forces. It

is then that the Cosmic Will or the Divine Grace flows through the soul and assures its progress.

Proper food, correct breathing exercises regulating the flow of cosmic forces, moral practices and spiritual exercises remove the obstacles in the body, mind, and ego, and keep us in tune with the Cosmic Will and fit to receive Divine Grace.

Divine Grace comes to us at first in the form of spiritual yearning and striving. As we become purer and purer, we come more and more in direct contact with the cosmic spiritual current.

In spiritual life, there must be tremendous effort but it must not be of the egocentric type. All our practices must be carried out in a spirit of prayer, self-surrender and dedication to the Divine. In our outlook, habits and ways of thinking, there must be a revolution. Spiritual life, if properly lived, must lead us from the egocentric position to the cosmocentric.

Divine Grace and self-effort

What we term as self-effort and Divine Grace supplement each other. We cannot have the one without the other. Without intense and unremitting striving on our part, we can never experience Divine Grace. Mere prayer without corresponding effort will not bear fruit. It will be just like the man who, finding his house on fire, started praying for rain instead of trying to put it out through means available then and there. The proper thing is to do all we can and also to pray.

A little girl's brother used to set a trap to catch birds. Thinking it was wrong and cruel, she became very sad and wept. After some time, the mother found her happy

and cheerful and was curious to know how such a change came about. "Mummy," the girl explained, "First I prayed that my brother may be a better boy, then I prayed that no more birds may fall into the trap, and then. . .", she added triumphantly, "I went out and kicked the old trap to pieces." So prayer is to be combined with self-effort to break old unethical habits and form new good ones.

Blinded by their own narrow ideas, theologians make too much of a mystery about Divine Grace, which they say can be attained only by following their own pet doctrines and dogmas. But the enlightened ones speak in a different language.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," says Christ in the greatest beatitude uttered by him. This is also the ancient teaching of the sages of India:

> "The resplendent and pure self whom pure and sinless souls, free from evil or impurities, realize as residing in the body, can be attained by truthfulness, concentration, true knowledge and perfect chastity."

The Supreme Reality or God is like the sun. It reflects itself on the pure mind.

With the help of an illuminating conversation between a devotee and Sri Sarada Devi—the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, and also known as the Holy Mother—we can clearly understand the connection between spiritual practice and Divine Grace.

Devotee: "Mother, how does one realise God? Worship, Japa, Meditation—do these help one?"

Mother: "None of these can help" (meaning help directly).

Devotee: "Then how does one attain to the wisdom of God?"

Mother: "It is only through His grace. But one must practise meditation and Japa. That removes the impurities of the mind. One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship and so forth. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realise Him right now if you become free from desires."[2]

The mind has become soiled by worldliness. Spiritual practices remove the impurities, and then just as the clear mirror reflects the shining sun in all its glory, the Divine Spirit is revealed clearly in the purified mind in a spontaneous way.

Here, one point must be understood clearly. The purity attained through spiritual disciplines may be of a very high order, but it is not perfect. The spiritual seeker is established in perfect purity only after Divine realisation, when objects of temptation become unreal, and the Supreme Spirit remains the only reality. That is why Sri Krishna declares in the *Bhagavad Gita:*

> "Sense-objects recede from the abstinent man but the taste for them lingers still; with the realisation of the Supreme Spirit, even the taste disappears."[3]

It is necessary for us to understand the relation of spiritual practice to Divine Grace and the important part they play in our lives in removing our inner obstacles. Then only can we feel enthusiastic about the disciplines which we ordinarily undergo in a haphazard way.

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2. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 487.
3. *The Bhagavad Gita*, II : 59

Once a disciple asked the Holy Mother about the utility of spiritual practice. She replied: "Through these spiritual disciplines, the ties of past Karma are cut asunder. . . . By these the turbulence of the sense-organs is subdued."

Devotee: "Can action ever cancel action?"

Mother: "Why not? If you do a good action that will counteract your past evil action. Past sins can be counteracted by meditation, Japa and spiritual thought."[4]

It is a matter of experience that to the extent we succeed in making our mind pure through moral and spiritual struggle, we feel the flow of Divine Grace. Swami Brahmananda used to tell us: "To obtain God's Grace is the most important aim in spiritual life. The breeze of His Grace is always blowing. Just unfurl your sail."[5] This means that we should keep ourselves open to the Divine Grace—the cosmic spiritual current—by attaining purity through the performance of regular spiritual practice.

Spiritual life — the preparation for receiving Divine Grace

All our spiritual teachers declare unanimously that the soul in its essential nature is pure spirit. Owing to ignorance, the spirit forgets itself and becomes identified with the ego, with the mind and the senses, with attachment and aversion, with the sense objects, with the body and its functions — all products of ignorance. The Atman puts on the masks of the causal body, the subtle body and the gross body. It is the masks that become impure, not

4. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 425 & 434.
5. *The Eternal Companion*, p. 181.

the Atman. The ego, the mind and the body may be defiled but the spirit ever remains pure, enlightened and free.

The *Katha Upanishad* declares:

> "As the sun, which forms the eye of the universe, is never defiled by the external impurities seen by the eyes, so the one Self that resides in all beings is never touched by the evils of the world."[6]

No impurity can affect our primary nature which ever remains pure. It is our secondary nature that becomes impure, and it can be and should be purified. Spiritual life is the cleansing of this secondary nature of ours, cleansing of the masks, the coverings of the ego, the mind and the body. So there is certainly hope for every one of us. It is rightly said that even as every saint has a past, so has every sinner a future. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna gives this categorical assurance:

> "Even the most sinful amongst men, if he worships Me, the Supreme Spirit, with unswerving devotion, must be regarded as virtuous, for he has resolved rightly. Soon he becomes righteous and attains eternal peace. Proclaim it boldly that My devotee is never destroyed."[7]
>
> "Giving up all other duties, take refuge in Me alone. I shall free you from all sins; grieve not."[8]

The Lord Himself removes all obstacles for the devotee who has completely surrendered himself to Him.

Divine Grace — the touchstone

A glorious illustration of how even the most sinful man can become righteous and attain the highest illumi-

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6. *The Katha Upanishad*, V: 11.
7. IX: 30-31.
8. *Ibid.*, XVIII: 66.

nation and peace through the grace of the Supreme Spirit is seen in the life of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous actor-dramatist and a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

According to his own statement, there was no sin that Girish had not committed. At one time, he considered religion a fraud. Later, however, a great change came over him and there grew a deep yearning for spiritual light and peace. It was then that he was drawn towards Sri Ramakrishna. Gradually his mind became purified, though he had to go a long way.

Once this conversation took place between them:

Girish: "Please bless me, sir."

Master: "Have faith in the Divine Mother and you will attain everything."

Girish: "But I am a sinner."

Master: "The wretch who constantly harps on sin becomes a sinner."

Girish: "Sir, the very ground where I sit becomes unholy."

Master: "How can you say that? Suppose a light is brought into a room that had been dark a thousand years, does it illumine the room little by little, or in a flash?"

Girish: "I have no sincerity; please grant it to me."

Master: "All right, you have faith."[9]

Young Narendra, who later became Swami Vivekananda, was very friendly to Girish and was warned by the Master not to associate with him too much: "Girish is like a cup in which garlic was kept. You may wash it a thousand times but can never get rid of the smell altogether." Girish heard this and felt offended. He asked the Master if the 'garlic smell' would go at all. The Master

9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 651.

assured him: "All the smell disappears when a blazing fire is lighted; if you heat the cup in the fire you will get rid of the smell; it becomes a new cup."[10] He further declared that people would be astounded at the marvellous change that would come over him. The garlic smell did disappear in due course and Girish became wonderfully transformed.

Directed by the Master, Girish followed the path of absolute self-surrender to the Divine Will — a path very few can follow. He would not promise to undergo even the simplest spiritual discipline, and was very happy when Sri Ramakrishna asked him to give him 'the power of attorney' and promised to assume all responsibility for his spiritual life. Girish at that time thought that the path of self-surrender was the easiest but later on realised what a most exacting thing it was. He had to *practise* self-surrender every moment. As a result of this, however, he came to feel the presence of the Lord constantly, and became a man of God. The Lord had removed all his vices — all his obstacles in the spiritual path — and filled his soul with His loving, Divine Presence. The last time some of us saw Girish, he told us: "As I move my hand, I feel that it is not I but the Lord who is moving it." His eyes and face were radiant with the glow of his inner illumination and unbounded love for the Lord. This is one of the most glorious illustrations of transformation brought about by Divine grace, which flows into the spiritual seeker as he strives his utmost.

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10. *Ibid.*, p. 681.

CHAPTER X

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN RELIGIOUS LIFE — II

Peculiar obstacles of our age

We are now living in an age of slogans. One of the much-repeated solgans is that religion is the opiate of the people, and is therefore to be avoided as poison. As a result of hearing it constantly, some of us who are not prepared to use our God-given power of reasoning, come to believe in it and lose our faith even in the true religion which, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, is really "the manifestation of the divinity already in man." There is the religion which binds the soul to narrow doctrines and dogmas; and there is again that which awakens our spiritual consciousness, makes us feel that we are all parts of the One Eternal Being and urges us to love and serve one another in a spirit of worship. We must overcome the obstacle created by a false slogan.

There is a second obstacle. It is the cheap psychological slogan. By advocating repression or suppression of our basic instincts, religion creates conflicts or complexes which are likely to make our mind and body ill; and therefore religion is to be avoided as a dangerous pursuit. Let us examine this statement in terms of psychology itself.

Repression is the involuntary process by which unacceptable desires or impulses are excluded from consciousness and thus being denied direct satisfaction are left to

operate in the subconscious. Suppression on the other hand is the forcible exclusion of an idea or desire from consciousness. Driven into the subconscious, it starts doing its havoc there. In both cases these underground enemies tend to produce neurosis and may affect mental and physical health adversely.

There is a class of dangerous psychologists who, for the purpose of relieving a patient from nervous tension, say: "Express your instincts freely." They even advocate a reckless immoral life, thereby suggesting a means which is not only unwholesome but also greatly harmful. In trying to avoid a certain "complex", the patient comes to form a worse "complex" and finally may be ruined in body and mind.

This is recognized by many wise and eminent psychologists. One of them, Dr. Hadfield, declares in his book *Psychology and Morals*:

> "From the point of view of cure, the advice to 'go and express your instincts' is only one-degree more foolish than the antiquated advice which used to be given to every neurotic girl 'All you need is to get married'. In actual experience I have never known a true neurosis cured by marriage, still less by sexual libertinism. But I have personally known many neuroses precipitated by marriage; indeed, I am sometimes tempted to think that half of my patients are neurotic because they are not married and the other half because they are !"[1]

The psychological term 'complex' actually means an idea or group of ideas closely bound together by a strong emotional bond. When we feel something strongly, we are dealing with a complex. The three most important com-

1. *Psychology and Morals*, p. 116.

plexes which play a great part in adult life are the ego, sex and herd complexes. These parent complexes produce others and the opposing demands of these complexes create serious conflicts in our being.

Complexes by themselves are not bad. They are bad when they take the form of ordinary selfishness, sensuality, greed, intolerance etc., and become harmful to the individual and society; they are good when they express themselves as the self-sacrificing spirit of the parents, patriots, and social workers and promote the welfare of the individual as well as of society.

The need for perfect sublimation

The Hindu socio-religious scheme recognizes all normal desires for wealth, progeny and social position and at first tries to take most men and women along the path of worldly achievement. Here great stress is laid on the householder's life in which desires are sublimated through the fulfilment of duties to the family and to society, and are directed to the Supreme Spirit through prayer, worship and meditation.

Some eminent Western psychologists advocate the sublimation of the instincts through socialisation. Thus Strecker and Appel say:

> "In sublimation, energy that might be used exclusively in carrying out primitive impulses is directed wholly or in part into more socially useful activities. ... not only for the development and preservation of society but also for the individual himself."[2]

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2. *Discovering Ourselves*, pp. 385 and 388.

Professor Overstreet declares:

> "Sublimation then, is the lot of all of us. Nay, it should be our privilege. The object of all civilised life, married or unmarried, must be to find its great sublimated interest."[3]

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Hindu spiritual teachers speak not only of socialisation but also of spiritualisation of our instincts, and they advocate it as a step towards Self-realisation or Divine Communion — the highest goal of spiritual life.

It is significant that some leading Western psychologists are coming to realise more and more the value of religion. In the opinion of Strecker and Appel, "Education, morality, and religion are organized aids to forward sublimation" and "a love which is not satisfied on the personal level may be fulfilled in the warmth of religious devotion or it may be requited in the practical devotion of social service."[4] Observes Dr. Jung, the great Swiss psychologist:

> ". . . the idea of an all-powerful divine Being is present everywhere unconsciously if not consciously, because it is an archetype. . . I therefore consider it wiser to acknowledge the idea of God consciously..."[5]

We are our own greatest obstacles

The more we struggle and move along the spiritual path, the more do we discover that our greatest obstacles

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3. *About ourselves*, pp. 249-250.
4. *Discovering Ourselves*, pp. 387 & 388.
5. *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. I : p. 70.

are ourselves. For our troubles we must take the whole responsibility on ourselves instead of blaming others.

There are biologists, psychologists and other thinkers who attribute or trace some of our troubles to the environment, some to our ancestors and some to the universal unconscious mind. With a view to avoiding our own responsibilities, sometimes, we, too, like to think along that line. How often do we justify ourselves by attributing all our obstacles and difficulties to outside agencies! But when we learn to analyse ourselves mercilessly, we discover that the troubles lie more with ourselves, and within ourselves.

William Ernest Hocking, a great Western thinker, has remarked: "Of all animals, it is man in whom heredity counts for least and conscious building forces for most."[6] So why should we make too much of the family tree or physical ancestry? Through intelligent self-effort we can completely transform ourselves and achieve such a complete change which is not possible for any animal. Dr. Karen Horney, a modern American psychologist, substantiates this point when he says, "It is not only the young child who is pliable. All of us retain the capacity to change, even to change in fundamental ways, as long as we live. This belief is supported by experience."[7]

We create many obstacles through our wrong thinking, wrong feeling and wrong doing. We may hamper our spiritual progress through too much self-laudation or self-condemnation. But by having the correct attitude and proper training we can get over these.

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6. *Human Nature and Its Remaking*—William Ernest Hocking, pp. 9-10.

7. *Our Inner Conflicts.*—Dr. Karen Horney.

Once a European gentleman came to see me. In the name of practising mental stillness and Samadhi he was inducing a kind of sleep. Thinking that he had reached the stage of Samadhi — which really is the ultimate goal of Yoga — he asked me: "There must be a state higher than Samadhi!" When, however, the correct thing was pointed out to him, he realised his mistake and got over his trouble.

In the name of practising meditation, an American was inducing a kind of dreamy state, when his imagination would run riot with a mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous, of pure and impure ideas, of images and emotion. And he was thinking that sitting for a long time in this morbid state was an achievement. He was advised to get up from his seat as soon as he felt drowsy and to improve the quality of his meditation instead of thinking too much of quantity. He carried out the suggestion and was greatly benefited.

A lady used to condemn herself too much for emotions she had outgrown. She was advised to forget all that as a bad dream, to assert her spiritual nature, do the duties of life well and devote a little time for prayer and meditation. She followed the instructions and a new chapter opened in her life.

Another was a painter with a great deal of scepticism. Later he became convinced of the utility of spiritual practice. Following certain instructions, he became more and more spiritual in his outlook and his painting also improved greatly in quality.

There have certainly been cases of failure, but there is no doubt that those who have been following the spiritual path sincerely are minimizing their obstacles, even getting

glimpses of the spiritual ideal and entering a new realm of light and peace.

Obstacles—lower and higher

There are obstacles and obstacles. There are the obstaccles we create and increase by yielding to our baser instincts like lust, anger and jealousy, and the obstacles of a Ramakrishna trying to attain the highest state of transcendental consciousness. When he was initiated by his Guru into the disciplines of Non-dual Vedanta, with the greatest ease he reached penultimate stage of that path when he found himself confronted with an insurmountable obstacle in the form of the blissful Mother of the Universe! But even this he overcame by following the instruction of his Guru and became merged in the Absolute.

Illumined souls do not drop from the skies. They are no doubt born with great potentialities by these they bring out by overcoming obstacles through intense spiritual struggle continued under the direction of competent spirittual teachers.

Sri Ramakrishna would sometimes remove the obstacles of his disciples. Young Rakhal — who later on became Swami Brahmananda—was once meditating. His mind became dry and restless and all his striving was of no avail. Greatly depressed, he wanted to go to his Master. But Ramakrishna himself knew the troubles of his disciple and was going to him. They met half way and the Master placed his hand on his disciple's head. Rakhal became free from distractions and his soul became filled with peace and joy.

When we met Swami Brahmananda, he was himself a highly illumined teacher, possessing tremendous spiritual

powers. We know of many instances when the Swami enabled many of his disciples, including some of us, to overcome their obstacles.

In the course of our spiritual strivings,we sometimes came to a closed door, or felt that we were in the midst of a thick cloud and were not able to see our way. In such cases the Swami urged us to intensify our spiritual practices and these removed the immediate obstacles. Sometimes, when we blundered greatly, he even gave us severe scoldings. We felt hurt, but became more and more introspective, continued our disciplines with increased intensity and rising above the obstacles found our way again. There were occasions when he gave us even glimpses of the higher Reality. By his blessed touch he could raise our mind to a higher plane of consciousness for the time being.

Constant struggle—the only way to overcome obstacles

Let not any one think that our life was made very easy that way ; it was just the contrary. Real struggle for mastering the experience started from that time, leading to greater struggle than ever before. The struggle is still going on, although it may not always become outwardly manifest. But through these struggles we are progressing.

Most intense were the spiritual strivings Swami Brahmananda and his brother disciples underwent after the passing away of their Master. Once Vijayakrishna Goswami —a great devotee who knew the Master and the disciples intimately—asked the Swami why he was practising such intense spiritual disciplines even after Sri Ramakrishna had given him all that was necessary. The Swami replied :

"I am only trying to become established in the vision of God which I received through the grace of the Mother."

Most of us do not, of course, get the opportunity of having an illumined father to guide us. There is no doubt that it is not safe to follow the spiritual path without a proper director. If, however, we are sincrere, we may, in due course, get one—at least an advanced spiritual seeker, if not an enlightened soul. Such a guide will minimise the risks in the path and help us in our progress. But when no human guide is available, we have to depend on ourselves and do the best we can, constantly praying to the Supreme Spirit, who is really the Ultimate Teacher, for light and guidance. The breeze of Divine Grace, as the Master and his disciples used to say, is constantly blowing. We have only to unfurl the sail. Through systematic spiritual striving we should come in touch with the divine spiritual current and move towards the goal steadily. We must be up and doing. We must remember the words of Sri Krishna :

> "A man should uplift himself by his own self. For this self is the friend of oneself and this self is the enemy of oneself."[8]

Spiritual life is a constant struggle, an indispensable part of which is the overcoming of moral obstacles. The illumined ones and the scriptures point out the way. Thus the Buddha says : "When men speak evil of you, thus must you train yourselves : 'Our heart shall be unwavering. No evil word shall we send forth. But we will abide compassionate of others' welfare, kindly of heart, without

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8. *Bhagavad Gita*, VI ; 5.

resentment.' And that man who thus speaks, we will suffuse with thoughts accompained by love; and so abide."

Christ declares: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; pray for them who despitefully use you." In the ancient Hindu scripture, the *Mahabharata*, we find: "Anger must be conquered by forgiveness; and the wicked must be conquered by honesty. The miser must be conquered by liberality; and falsehood must be conquered by truth."

Now there are obstacles caused by Tamas and Rajas. Under the influence of Tamas, the mind becomes full of ignorance, dull, sluggish and deluded. When dominated by Rajas, the mind becomes restless, passionate, disharmonious and unhappy. What we need is the predominance of Sattva, which brings right knowledge, goodness, harmony, cheerfulness and happiness to the mind. The obstacles of Tamas and Rajas are to be removed as much as possible with the help of Sattva, which itself is finally to be transcended in order to attain Self-realisation.

The Way shown by Patanjali

Patanjali, the great teacher of Yoga, asks us to practise *Yama* and *Niyama* and reach the state of non-attachment and harmony, in which the spirit transcends its limitations, its identifications with the non-self, and manifests itself in its true, pure nature. He speaks of the many obstacles which confront the aspirant in the various stages of spiritual struggle, and suggests means by which they can be overcome: "The obstructions to Yoga are killing, falsehood, etc. whether committed, caused or approved." "To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts should be raised." He explains:

"The tendency to harm, to lie, to steal, to live an unchaste life and to depend upon others too much, is to be overcome by the practice of non-stealing, of chastity and self-help or non-dependence on others. Then come the practice of Niyama. Uncleanliness is to be overcome by clean habits of the body and mind, discontent by contentment and cheerfulness, being given to too much comfort by asceticism, desultory reading by deep study and assimiliation of ideas, and ego-centricity by devotion to the Supreme Spirit."[9]

This is the first step of purification—termed by others as sublimation or purgation—in the spiritual path. Only after this can one take up the later steps of practice such as posture, breath-control, withdrawal of the mind from distractions, concentration, meditation and absorption, with success.

Patanjali gives a list of the various obstacles experienced at the different stages of Yoga practice. These are : Disease or disturbances in the body, languor or the feeling of helplessness in the mind, vacillation or doubt, lethargy or making no effort towards the attainment of communion, sloth or inactivity of the body and mind due to Tamas, absence of non-attachment or hankering of the mind for sense-objects, mistaken notions or wrong ideals, non-attainment of the goal or not reaching the state of communion, and instability or inability of the mind to remain stable having gone very close to the state of communion. Through Japa or the repetition of the Divine Name and meditation these obstacles are overcome and introspection is gained in due course.[10]

9. *Yoga Sutras.* II : 30 & 32.
10. *Ibid.*, I : 30.

Obstacles of various kinds may come even to very advanced souls. The *Vedantasara* of Sadananda speaks of four obstacles to the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* or the highest superconscious state : torpidity or sleep, distraction or the mind's occupation with non-spiritual things, attachment due to lurking desires for pleasures, and enjoyment of the bliss of spiritual visions of lower states of consciousness. The remedy prescribed is :

> "When the mind is torpid, rouse it; when it is distracted, bring it back to consciousness; when it becomes attached, be aware of it and make it detached; do not linger on the bliss of dualistic visions; be unattached to all 'vrittis' or mental waves, through the exercise of extreme discrimination between the absolutely real and the unreal." [11]

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna speaks of the Yogi's controlled mind as being similar to the flame of the lamp which is sheltered from the wind and does not flicker.[12] As has been already mentioned, this ideal is spoken of by Patanjali also at the very beginning of his Yoga aphorisms : "Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff from taking various forms . . . At that time the Seer rests in his own unmodified, perfectly pure state."[13]

Japa and Meditation—the best means

Patanjali does not ask us to overcome the obstacles one by one. They are to be got rid of by properly following several alternative instructions, one of the most important of them being : "Repeat the Divine Name, as

11. *The "Vedantasara" of Sadananda.* — Swami Nikhilananda. Verse 215.
12. *The Bhagavad Gita* VI : 19.
13. *Yoga Sutras.* I : 2 & 3.

indicated by OM and meditate on the Divine Spirit." The commentator explains the aphorism thus :

> "After the repetition of OM, the spiritual seeker should have recourse to meditation; after meditation he should again take to repetition. Through the perfection of repetition and meditation, the Supreme Spirit becomes manifest. . . . All the obstacles cease to exist by virtue of devotion to the Lord, and then follows for him the perception of his own real nature. He comes to realise that just as the Lord is Spirit — pure, blissful, free from troubles — so also is the spirit which functions through the mind." [14]

Swami Brahmananda used to encourage us saying :

> "Plunge yourself deep into the practise of Japa and meditation. Now the mind is gross and feeds on gross objects. But as Japa and meditation are practised, the mind becomes subtle and learns to grasp subtle truths. Practise, practise. See for yourself if there is really a God. . . . The veils of Maya will be removed one after another; a new vision will open. Then you will see what a wonderful treasure lies within you. You will unfold your own divinity and inherit happiness." [15]

So let us repeat the Divine Name and meditate on Him. Let the body and the mind vibrate with the cosmic spiritual rhythm. Let the cosmic current sweep away all the ills of the body and all the distractions of the mind. Let our meditation on the Great Illuminator—the Guru seated in our hearts—dispel all darkness and reveal to us His divine nature and also our spiritual nature, which is eternal, ever-pure, ever-enlightened, ever-free and ever-blissful.

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14. Cf. *Yoga Sutras*: I : 27 & 22.

15. *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 164 & 165.

CHAPTER XI

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Methods of Worship

A disciple once asked Swami Brahmananda : "What is the significance of all the gods and goddesses ? Do they really exist ? What is the meaning and purpose of ritualistic worship ?" The Swami replied : "These many gods and goddesses represent but so many different aspects of the one Godhead. Men differ in their temperaments and so are inclined to different ways of worship. To meet the needs of all, the scriptures prescribe distinct methods of worship."

These distinct methods of worship are for persons in different stages of spiritual evolution. First is the ritualistic worship of God, embodied in an image or symbol. Higher than this is the worship of God through prayer and Japa or repetition of the divine name and meditation upon it. By this means, the aspirant prays, chants the Divine Name and dwells upon the shining form of his Chosen Ideal within his own heart. Higher still is meditation . When a man practises this form of worship, he keeps up a constant flow of thought toward God and becomes absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. He goes beyond prayer and Japa, but the sense of duality, the "I" and "Thou" remains.

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1. Abridged and adapted from *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 118 & 119.

Different stages of spiritual evolution

The highest method of worship is meditation on the unity of the Atman and Brahman—of the individual soul and the Supreme Spirit. This leads directly and immediately to God, the Supreme Spirit. The aspirant experiences Brahman as an actual realisation of the omnipresent Reality. However, if an average man is instructed to meditate on this, he will neither grasp the truth of it, nor be able to follow the instructions. But the same person can understand and perform the worship of God with flowers, incence and other accessories of worship. It is of vital importance that a man starts his spiritual journey from where he is. By doing ritualistic worship his mind will gradually become concentrated and this will increase his devotion to the performance of Japa. The finer the mind becomes, the greater will be its capacity for the higher forms of worship. Through Japa, the mind will be inclined toward meditation, until the aspirant moves naturally and gradually towards the highest ideal.

Swami Brahmananda gives the illustration of a man standing in the courtyard of a house. He wants to reach the roof, but instead of climbing the staircase step by step he permits himself to be thrown up bodily, thus causing serious injury. So it is with spiritual life. One should follow the gradual path, for just as there are laws governing the physical world, so there are laws governing the spiritual world also.

Visions

In 1901 Swami Brahmananda, while sitting on the banks of the Ganges, saw the Divine Mother coming across

the river towards the Belur Math from the direction of Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna had worshipped Her as Kali. At the same time, Swami Vivekananda returned from Calcutta and expressed his desire to worship the Divine Mother in image. He further added that his spiritual eye had seen the Mother coming to the monastery and being worshipped there. Hearing this, Swami Brahmananda narrated his own vision to Swamiji. That year the Divine Mother was worshipped in the monastery with great rejoicing.

The Divine Spirit becomes manifest in forms familiar to the devotee. Thus a Hindu may see certain luminous and glorious froms of various gods and goddesses; and followers of other faiths will have visions of their particular aspect of the deity—Christ, perhaps, the Virgin Mary, and so on—depending upon their religion. St. Paul describes his vision which converted and transformed him :

> "I saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round me, and I heard a voice saying unto me 'Saul Saul! Why persecutest thou me?' And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest'."

This vision transformed Saul, the persecutor of Christians, into Paul, the ardent apostle of Christ. Here God appeared to St. Paul, in the form of a light.

The Jewish Bible speaks of a different type of vision. The Lord appeared before Moses and the children of Israel and led them out of Egypt. In Exodus we find :

> "He went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light."

Sri Ramakrishna and other Hindu devotees had visions of luminous forms. These spiritual visions are different manifestations of the one Godhead, which is beyond name and form, and yet manifests Itself through name and form. Swami Abhedananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, used to have various visions of gods and goddesses. One day he saw all these forms merging in one luminous being. When he reported this to the Master, Sri Ramakrishna said : "Hereafter you will no longer have these visions. You have risen above that stage." And this proved to be true. Thenceforward, the Swami meditated not on forms but on the infinite, all-pervading aspect of the impersonal Brahman. Thus he came to know that there are stages on the way to the Supreme, Formless Absolute.

Dualism and Non-Dualism

In the dualistic stage the devotee feels that God is separated from himself, and approaches the Godhead with human feelings like that of the servant to the master, the child to the parent, a friend to a friend, a lover to the beloved.

The next stage is qualified non-dualism. The devotee feels the Supreme Spirit as the Whole and all His worshippers as infinitesimal parts of the Whole. There is but one great Whole to which all attributes cling.

The last stage is that of absolute non-dualism. The devotee realises that the one Infinite Spirit is manifesting Itself in one form as the Cosmic Soul and in another as the human soul. In the course of his spiritual evolution, the seeker realises that the cosmic and the individual are one in their essential nature. The Whole and the part are both manifestations of the same Infinite Spirit.

Conceptions of the Godhead

The Bhagavad Gita speaks of various conceptions of the Godhead. The Ultimate Reality is beyond all conceptions of existence and non-existence, but It manifests Itself through Its inscrutable power as Isvara or God, soul and the Universe. Again, it is this transcendental Spirit that manifests Itself in a special way as a divine Incarnation, and Sri Krishna declares :

> "Though unborn and eternal by nature, I accept birth through My own divine power. For the protection of righteousness and the destruction of wickedness I am born in every age."[2]

The divine Incarnation is the greatest of all spiritual teachers. Sri Krishna revealed to his disciple, Arjuna, the glory of His cosmic form which he wished to see. "With these eyès of yours," said Sri Krishna, "you cannot see Me. I give you the divine eye." What did Arjuna see when he received the divine eye ? "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of the Mighty One."[3] There, in that infinite light, the disciple beheld the whole universe with all its tender and terrible aspects. He was afraid, his soul trembled and he prayed :

> "O Infinite One, Lord of the gods, Abode of the Universe, Thou art the imperishable Being and non-being and that which is the Supreme. Salutations to Thee before; salutations to Thee behind; salutations to Thee on every side. I rejoice that I have seen what was never seen

2. *The Bhagavad Gita*. IV : 6-8.
3. *Ibid.*, XI : 8-12.

before, but my mind is also troubled with fear. Show me that other form of Thine."[4]

The universal form of the Lord was overwhelming to the devotee. He longed for a humanised form with which he could establish a loving human relationship, regarding the Lord as father, mother, friend, or beloved. Krishna manifested himself as teacher. This is what every devotee seeks at first. But as he becomes established in divine love, the Lord, the Supreme Guru, reveals to him, in due course, His manifold forms, His universal form, and also His transcendent aspect beyond all name and form.

God is both with form and without form

How can God be both formless and still appear in many forms ? When Sri Ramakrishna asked 'M' — the compiler of "*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*" —whether he believed in God with form or without form, the disciple was perplexed. He was a highly educated man. He asked himself : 'How can these contradictory ideas be true at the same time ?' But he said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, I like to think of God as formless.' The reply of the Master was very significant. 'Very good,' he said, 'it is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form ; that is quite right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true, and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.'[5]

Elsewhere Sri Ramakrishna observes, 'God is formless, and God is possessed of forms too. He is also that

4. *Ibid.*, XI : 18, 40, 45.
5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 4.

which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone knows what He is'. The formless manifests itself through divine forms and these forms melt again into the formless.

> "Think of Brahman — Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, Absolute — as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence of the devotee's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a person. But with the rising of the sun of knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. Then one does not feel any more that God is a person, nor does one see God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his 'I' any more." [6]

Sri Ramakrishna gives another illustration :

> "Fire itself has no definite shape, but as glowing embers it assumes different forms. Thus the formless fire is seen endowed with forms. Similarly, the formless God sometimes invests Himself with definite forms."

Choose the Ideal that helps you most

With what aspect of God should we start our spiritual life ? Swami Brahmananda says : "It is of vital importance that a man begins his spiritual journey from where he is." We must find out where we stand and choose our Ishta (Chosen Ideal). It must be that which is best suited to the particular stage of evolution of the person and which appeals to his intellect, feeling, and will. All men are in different stages of evolution. The Uttara Gita says :

> "To the twice-born who is culturally more advanced, fire or light is the symbol of the Divine Spirit. For the sage

6. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

who has become introspective, the Supreme Spirit dwells in his own heart. Illumined ones see It shining everywhere. To those with poorer understanding, the Supreme Spirit appears in human form, and they require an image or idol of this form, before they can begin their spiritual progress."

There are three classes of devotees. According to Sri Ramakrishna, the lowest one says, 'God is up there,' pointing to a heaven beyond the clouds. The slightly higher devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the indwelling Spirit. The highest devotee says, 'God has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God.'

None of us would like to belong to the lowest class of devotees who think that God is beyond the skies, nor are we willing to consider ourselves persons of poor understanding. Many of us think we do not need the use of material symbols for worship and meditation ; but if we are still in the lower stages of spiritual development, we are like children. We need not be ashamed of being children because, if a child grows in a normal way, he is capable of wonderful improvement. If a child is not fed properly, he may be stunted in growth and remain so for the rest of his life.

Meaning of Symbols

Perhaps the understanding of the meaning of symbols will throw a new light on the subject. The Latin *Symbols* or *Symbolum* means a sign by which one knows or infers a thing. Symbols are signs for expressing the invisible by means of visible or sensuous representations. To the Christian, the cross is a symbol of salvation because of its

connection with the crucifixion. To many mystics, the circle is a symbol of eternity because, like eternity, it has neither beginning nor end. The triangle represents the creative power out of which all things come into being, through which they are sustained and to which they ultimately return. In Hinduism, the hexagon, the octagon, and various other mystical diagrams are used to represent the Deity. The devotee keeps one such diagram before him as he meditates, and through the law of association, the reference to the symbol enables him to continue his meditation without any break. Again, to a Hindu the triangle may mean the creative power, while to a Christian, the same thing may mean the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

There are, in fact, two types of symbols—geometric and anthropomorphic. The geometric symbols are sometimes referred to as *Yantras*.

The anthropomorphic symbol is the human symbol. It may either be a physical symbol like the paintings or statues, of divine Personalities such as Buddha lost in meditation, Krishna, Vishnu, Siva, Durga, Madonna with the child Jesus in her arms, Christ, Ramakrishna, and so on. Or it may be a human relationship such as that of God as father, brother, mother, friend, etc. Human relationship itself is a symbol, whether an image is used or not.

The necessity of images

Again and again, the contemporary man asks : 'Why do we need images ?' The answer is that we need them simply because many of us are idolatrous to a great degree. We are too fond of idols of flesh and blood. We follow

the cult of body-worship and are too fond of our own bodies and the bodies of those we love, forgetting the spirit within. We are too fond of our images and pictures. Many of us are really persons of poor understanding and need the use of physical symbols and holy personalities at the beginning of our spiritual lives.

Sri Ramakrishna says : 'The thorn that has got into the fiesh is to be removed by another thorn, and then both may be thrown away.' Similarly, we must substitute the holy form in place of the worldly form and the holy personality in place of the worldly personality.

There are persons who possess an inordinate body-consciousness and sense of personality. They continuously get emotionally involved with others, and yet refuse to accept a personal aspect of the Deity, or choose a Divine Incarnation as an ideal to follow in their spiritual lives. But that is what they need to enable them to transcend body-consciousness and rise to the spiritual plane.

The symbol is a means of remembering the Divine Spirit through the association of ideas. The Divine must not be brought to the level of the image. The symbol is helpful as long as it is understood that it is a representation of the Divine Spirit. So long as we do this, such worship is not idolatry, but a step towards the realisation of the Absolute.

The truth behind image worship explained by Swami Vivekananda

During the days of his wandering through India, Swami Vivekananda went to the State of Alwar. The then Maharaja was a young man of modern education. He said to the Swami : 'I hav: no faith in idol-worship. I cannot

really worship wood, earth, or stone, as other people do.' The Swami replied quietly : 'Every man should follow his religious ideal according to his own faith.' The ministers and courtiers were surprised at the answer, having expected something different. But the Swami's eyes, looking around, alighted upon a picture of the Maharaja. Taking that picture from the wall, he asked the Dewan and the courtiers to spit upon it. They were naturally shocked at the proposal. The Swami said, 'Spit upon it, it is but a piece of paper.' The bewildered courtiers replied, 'What are you asking us to do ? This is the likeness of our Maharaja. How could we do such a thing ?' Then, turning to the prince, the Swami said : 'That is a shadow of your highness which brings you to their minds, and they naturally look upon it with respect. In the same way, an image in the temple brings to the mind of the devotees their chosen aspect of the Deity. Devotees worship God with the help of an image. They do not worship the wood, the earth, or the metal of which the image is composed. They worship the spirit symbolised by the image. The idol is merely a peg on which we hang our faith.' The Maharaja understood and said : 'You have opened my eyes.'[7]

Symbols for different seekers

If one symbol proves inadequate, there are always others that may be substituted as we progress. The spiritual seeker moves from a lower stage to a higher one, with an ever-increasing awareness, until the soul finally achieves the unity with the Oversoul.

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7. Vide *The Life of Swami Vivekananda.* p. 211.

Just as there are personal symbols, there are impersonal ones also. Fire has been such a symbol from very ancient times. The soul is conceived as a spark of an infinite, ever-burning fire. Sometimes God is conceived as a circle, and the souls as little points of consciousness within the circumference of the circle that embraces the whole universe. The ocean is another great symbol. The individual soul is thought of as a river moving towards the ocean, and merging at its mouth into the deep vast ocean. The devotee may also think of himself as a mere bubble floating on the ocean, sustained by it, and ultimately going back into it. The soul may also be thought of as a fish swimming in the infinite ocean.

Or, the human personality is conceived as a clay pot immersed in the ocean, water inside, water outside. When the devotee succeeds in breaking the pot, the water inside and the water outside become merged into one.

Better than the water symbol is the idea of infinite space in which a bird flies. The human personality may also be considered as a breath from the Infinite, or a ray of the infinite light. Or it may be considered as a vessel filled with the spirit.

Sound itself is a symbol. With the help of sound we try to express what is beyond all sound. Any idea may be a symbol with which we try to express something beyond thought. As we take the help of external symbols, as we pray and repeat the divine name, we come to have an intuitive experience of the relationship between the eternal soul and the eternal God. This is the realisation which culminates in a sense of unity with God, the experience which transcends thought, name and form.

Light—The best symbol

The best symbol, perhaps, is Light, the Light that shines everywhere. An illumined sage, returning from the super-conscious plane, cried.

> "There the sun cannot illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars; the flash of lightning cannot illumine that. What to speak of this mortal fire! That shining, everything else shines."[8]

There are mystics who realise the Supreme Spirit in the form of light. Sri Ramakrishna spoke of one of his great experiences to Swami Brahmananda :

> "Once, while I was meditating in the temple, screen after screen of Maya was removed from my consciousness. Mother showed me a Light more brilliant than a million suns. From that Light came forth a spiritual form. Then this form melted away into the Light itself. The formless had taken form and then melted again into the formless."[9]

Swami Brahmananda instructed his disciples thus :

> "In meditation, you should think that your Chosen Ideal is luminous and that His light is lighting everything. Think of Him as living and conscious. As you continue meditating thus on the form of the Chosen Ideal, the form will gradually melt into the formless, the Infinite. Then will come a vivid sense of the Divine Living Presence."[10]

The *Bhagavad Gita* tells us : 'The Light of all lights shines in the hearts of all beings.'

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8. *The Mundaka Upanishad.* II : 2 : 10.
9. *The Eternal Companion.* P. 125.
10. *Ibid.*, P. 140.
11. XIII: 17.

How does this light shine within ourselves? Just as we have our little bodies, there is also the cosmic body. Similarly, like the individual mind, there is the cosmic mind. The same Light shines both on the cosmic and the individual. With the eye of intuition, the spiritual seeker perceives this truth. As Sri Ramakrishna has clearly illustrated, 'The body is a plate, as it were, containing the water of mind, intelligence and ego. Brahman is like the sun. It is reflected in the water. Therefore the devotee sees the divine form.'

The light reflected in the individual mind is the soul. The light reflected in the cosmic mind is the Universal Spirit. Waves rising in the individual mind reflect the light; so do the waves rising in the cosmic mind. Whatever rises in the individual mind is lighted by the Spirit. Whatever rises in cosmic mind is also lighted by the same Spirit. Divine forms are seen within the little mind. Divine forms are also seen outside, within the cosmic mind. Beyond both the individual and the cosmic is the One Light of Infinite Spirit, beyond name and form. All forms whether in the outer or inner world are lighted by the same Divine Light.

The highest spiritual experience

All these forms reflect the divine Light, and there is no longer any division between the inner and the outer worlds. There may still be a shadowy partition, but everything the illumined devotee feels, sees, or thinks is lighted by the divine Light of the Infinite. This is the highest spiritual experience. The doll of salt, in Sri Ramakrishna's parable, is merged into the ocean.

The Infinite Consciousness is beyond all name, beyond all form, and beyond all personality. This is the Ultimate Reality; but to apprehend it we must use some symbol. We are like children who need support. Forms and images are such supports. Let us have them by all means, but let us also try to outgrow our spiritual childhood and ultimately attain the highest goal of life, realisation of Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Eternal Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECRET STAIRS TO SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS

Swami Vivekananda, himself a person well established in the state of superconsciousness, has said the following illuminating words on the subject:

> "According to the *Yogis* there are two nerve currents in the spinal column, called *Pingala* and *Ida*, and a hollow canal called Sushumna running through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is what the Yogis call the 'Lotus of the Kundalini'; they describe it as triangular in form, in which, in the symbolical language of the *Yogis*, there is a coiled-up power called the *Kundalini*. When the Kundalini awakes, it tries to force a passage through this hollow canal, and as it rises step by step, as it were, layer after layer of the mind becomes open and all the different visions and wonderful powers come to the *Yogi*. When it reaches the brain, the yogi becomes perfectly detached from the body and mind; the soul finds itself free.
>
> "The yogi conceives of several centres, beginning with the *Muladhara*, the basic, and ending with the *Sahasrara*, the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain.
>
> "The Sushumna is in ordinary persons closed up at the lower extremity; no action comes through it. The *Yogi* proposes a practice by which it can be opened, and the nerve currents made to travel through. When a sensation is carried to a centre, the centre reacts. This reaction, in the case of automatic centres, is followed by motion; in the case of conscious centres it is followed

first by perception, and secondly by motion. All perceptions are the reactions to actions from outside. How, then, do perceptions in dreams arise? There is then no action from outside. The sensory motions, therefore, are coiled up somewhere.

"Now the centre where all these . . . sensations are, as it were, stored up, is called the *Muladhara*, the root receptacle and the coiled-up energy of action is *Kundalini*, 'the coiled-up'.

"If this coiled-up energy be roused and made active, and then consciously made to travel up the *Sushumma* canal, as it acts upon centre after centre, a tremendous reaction will set in. When a minute portion of energy travels along a nerve fibre and causes reaction from the centres, the perception is either dream or imagination. But when by the power of long internal mediation the vast mass of energy stored up travels along *Sushumna* and strikes the centres, the reaction is tremendous, immensely superior to the rection of dream or imaginations, immensely more intense than the reaction of snese perception. It is supersensuous perception. And when it reaches the metropolis of all sensation, the brain, the whole brain as it were, reacts, and the result is the full blaze of illumination, the perception of the Self.

"As the *Kundalini* force travels from centre to centre, layer after layer of the mind, as it were, opens up, and this universe is perceived by the *Yogi* in its fine or causal form. Then alone the causes of this universe, both as sensation and reaction, are known as they are, and hence comes all knowledge. The causes being known, the knowledge of the effects is sure to follow.

"Thus the rousing of the *Kundalini* is the one and only way to attaining Divine wisdom, superconscious perception, realisation of the Spirit. The rousing may come in various ways, through love for God, through the mercy

of perfected sages, or through the power of the analytic will of the philosopher."[1]

What do we mean by superconscious perception or superconsciousness? It is a mystifying subject, but we shall become clearer in our conception as we proceed. By superconsciousness we mean a consciousness quite different from that of our waking state, dream state, or the state of deep sleep.

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences

An experience of Sri Ramakrishna aptly demonstrates this superconscious state. In later years he narrated this incident of his boyhood:

> "One day in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating the paddy-fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thunder-cloud. As it spread rapidly, enveloping the whole sky, a flight of white cranes flew overhead in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down. Some people found me in that plight and carried me home in their arms."[2]

This was the first time that the Master had lost consciousness and attained superconsciousness in ecstasy, overpowered by an inexpressible emotion and unspeakable joy.

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Vol. I. P. 160 ff.

2. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*. P. 20.

Later he realised the Divine Mother of the universe as a limitless, effulgent ocean of consciousness, and in the depths of his being he was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother and also saw Her manifest everywhere—in all beings, in all things. This experience is the very summit of superconsciousness. All mystics — Hindu, Christian, Sufi, and others—speak of it. 'Sometimes', the Master used to say, 'I find that the universe is saturated with the consciousness of God as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.'[3]

Views on superconscious experience—
Eastern and Western

The teachers of Vedanta recognise different stages of superconscious experience: "When I identify myself with the body, I look upon Thee, O Lord, as my Master and myself as Thy servant. When I think of myself as the individualised soul, I regard Thee as the Infinite Whole and myself as a part. When I look upon myself as the Spirit transcending all my limitations, my individuality is lost in Thee, and I realise that I am merely Thyself.' These are the three storeys, as it were, of superconsciousness. St. John of the Corss, one of the greatest of the Christian Mystics, declared that on the last rung of the mystic ladder, divine love enables the soul to be entirely assimilated in God. This is an experience which only a few exceptional souls can gain, but even those who have realised it cannot describe the state of 'absolute assimilation with the Divine Essence'. . . .

The Hindu sages have likened it to the experience of a dumb man, who can taste a sweet but is powerless to

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3. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 200.

describe it. To illustrate this highest state, which is beyond all thought and speech, Sri Ramakrishna speaks of a doll of salt. It moves towards the ocean in its desire to measure the ocean's depth, but the moment it touches the water, it loses all shape and form and becomes lost in it.

There are spiritual seekers, who, tired of their individuality, their separate personality, long to become lost in superconsciousness. But most of us want 'not to become sugar, but to *taste* sugar.' We want to taste the bliss of Divine consciousness. We, spiritual aspirants, who are identified with our own ego, mind, and body, wish to free ourselves from their bondage, to feel ourselves as parts or modes of the Oversoul, the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of our souls. How can we attain this union?

In a wonderful poem, St. John of the Cross gives some clues to the spiritual seekers, as to how this union is brought about. He describes in mystical language the soul's journey to God the Beloved:

Into the darkness, and yet safe
By secret stair and in disguise,
Oh gladsome hap!
In darkness, and in secret I crept forth,
My house being wrapt in sleep.
Into the happy night
In secret, seen of none,
Nor saw I ought.
Without, or other light or guide.
Save that which in my heart did burn,.
This fire it was that guided me
More certainly than midday sun,
Where He did wait,
He that I knew imprinted on my heart,
In place, where none appeared.
Oh Night, that led me, guiding night,

Oh Night far sweeter than the Dawn;
Oh Night, that did so then unite
The Loved with his Beloved.
Transforming Lover into Beloved.[4]

Plotinus, who is called the father of Christian mysticism, speaks of the soul's movement towards the Godhead as 'the flight of the lone to the alone'. The soul leaves its home, body, all alone by a secret stair to the abode of the Beloved ever waiting to be in union with 'eternal portion of Himself'. This, clearly, is a plane of existence beyond all ordinary human consciousness.

'Chakras' in 'Sushumna' — the secret stairs

The goal of all spiritual striving is the attainment of the superconscious experience or Samadhi as the Hindus call it. The Secret Stairs are called the Chakras in Sushumna. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find the Master mystic of our age giving us a picturesque description of what happened within himself. The Master describes the movement of the spiritual current or Kundalini along the Chakras or centres of consciousness. Speaking to his disciples he said:

> "Some say that my soul, going into Samadhi, flies about like a bird in the Mahakasa, the Infinite Space. Once a Sadhu came here (Dakshineswar) and said to me, 'There are five kinds of Samadhi. I find you have experienced them all. In these Samadhis one feels the sensation of the Spiritual Current to be like the movement of an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird, or a serpent', '(Mystics use strange, language). Sometimes the Spiritual Current rises through

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4. "Songs of the Soul" in *The Dark Night of the Soul.* English Translation by Gabriela Cunninghame Graham. Pp. 29 and 30.

the spine, crawling like an ant. Sometimes, in Samadhi the soul swims joyfully in the ocean of divine ecstasy like a fish. Sometimes, when I lie down on my side, I feel the Spiritual Current pushing me like a monkey and playing with me joyfully. That current, like a monkey, suddenly with one jump reaches the Sahasrara (the highest centre of consciousness). Sometimes, again, the Spiritual Current rises like a bird, hopping from one branch to another (until the final flight) . . . Sometimes the Spiritual Current moves up like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it reaches the head and I go into Samadhi. A man's spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused."[5]

Rousing spiritual consciousness

The Kundalini dwells in the Muladhara at the base of the spine. It passes along the Sushumna, the spiritual channel, until it finally induces Samadhi, the superconscious state. This state is never reached by merely reading books. One must pray to God out of great restlessness and longing for liberation, for it is out of this restlessness for God that the Kundalini is first roused. This restlessness, the real soul-hunger, the yearning — not artificially stimulated emotional outbursts — is to be intensified through systematic moral purification, prayer, meditation and other spiritual exercises. Describing his experience Sri Ramakrishna says:

"Just before my attaining this state of mind (Samadhi), it had been revealed to me how the Kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all this culminates in Samadhi."[6]

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5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Pp. 813 & 814.
6. *Ibid.*

These centres are like lotus buds hanging downwards. As the spiritual current moves upward, each lotus stands erect and opens its petals. When the thousand-petalled lotus opens in the head, the goal is reached. 'Since then (after the blossoming of the thousand-petalled lotus),' said Sri Ramakrishna, 'I have been in this state'[7]

Meditation, without proper guidance, on the Muladhara, the basic centre where dwells the Kundalini, may stimulate animal desires and passions, leading to disaster. For most people the safest course is to open up the higher centres by moving first along the side channels, called in Sanskrit 'Ida' and 'Pingala'. These are connected with man's physical and psychic life. When the obstruction in the higher channel is partly removed through the necessary spiritual practices, it is easier for the Kundalini to rise higher and higher.

The Yogis tell us that the bondage of the soul is due to its being controlled by the lower centres. Spiritual freedom is attained by making the higher centres active and enabling them to control the lower ones.

After the attainment of the highest state of super-consciousness, ordinary souls can no longer retain their physical bodies. But the greatest illumined souls, like the Divine Incarnations and their companions, can come down from their superconscious state, because they like to live in the company of devotees and enjoy the love of God. God retains in them the ego of knowlege and the ego of devotion, so that they may teach the world.

7. *Ibid.*

Microcosm and Macrocosm built on the same plan

In their teachings, one finds the description of the secret stairs to superconsciousness which is lying hidden in every one. The power of introspection revealed to the sages not only the microcosm but also the macrocosm. 'That which is not in the microcosm does not exist in the macrocosm.' During the days of his wanderings, after the passing away of the Master (Sri Ramakrishna), Swami Vivekananda had a remarkable experience which he wrote down in the note-book he always carried. 'The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the Universal Soul in the Living Prakriti (Nature)—the objective universe.'[8] This is an ancient truth and it is well to keep it in mind while studying the teachings of the great ones.

The microcosm, the human personality, consists of three bodies: (1) the causal body, which, during the period of ignorance, limits consciousness and gives it the covering of the ego; (2) the mental or the emotional body; and (3) the gross body. Those who possess a subtle sense discover that our physical body is placed in a subtle body and that in turn is encased in the causal body. This is one complete microcosm which is a part of the macrocosm.

Relation between thoughts, feeling and physical activities

Emotions play a tremendous part in physical life. The body can never be sufficiently healthy for spiritual practices unless the emotions, intellect, and will are harmonised as

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda.* P. 198.

much as possible. Behind both the individual and the universal is the same Spirit, the one infinite Spirit manifesting itself both in the individual and the cosmic. Our little body is a part of the infinite Cosmic body; our little mind is a part of the Cosmic mind; our little ego is a part of the Cosmic Ego. It is enough for us if we can experience the relation between the Soul and the Oversoul. This is real religion. Each of us dwells every moment in the eternal life but without knowing it. Through moral practice, prayer, and self-surrender, the spiritual seeker develops a new sense of introspection, a power which reveals to him the existence of the secret stairs. On rising above the limitations of the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body, the aspirant experiences the macrocosm of the Eternal God, and the soul finally comes in touch with the Oversoul.

Thoughts, emotions, and activities affect the sex organ, stomach, eyes, and will-power. Schopenhauer says. 'When sex becomes the focus of the will, a new world opens up for the youth.' At other times the stomach becomes the focus of the will and at still other time, the heart. There is an inseparable connection between the moods, bodily organs, and the centres of consciousness. Thoughts stimulate the nerve centres. The Yogis tell us of the various Chakras, which, in the words of Arthur Avalon in his *Serpent Power*, are: 'subtle centres that control and vitalise the gross bodily tracts indicated by the various regions of the vertebral column, ganglia, plexi, nerves, arteries, and the organs situated in these respective regions.'[9]

9. P. 17 (134).

Human moods and centres of consciousness

The lowest centre is at the base of the spinal column, close to the organ of evacuation. The next is located in the region corresponding to the sex organ. The third is in the region of the navel, the fourth in the region of the heart, the fifth corresponds to the throat, and finally the sixth is between the eyebrows. Each of these centres, or Chakras, is a point of contact between the microcosm and the macrocosm — the individual and the universal. When a person dwells in a particular centre, he becomes conscious not only of himself but also of other things belonging to that corresponding plane. When the mind is immersed in worldliness, it dwells in the lower planes, resulting in sensuality. The upper centres are connected with the spiritual life of man. When a man is spiritually awakened, his consciousness rises first to the heart. Then he sees a new spiritual light. In mute wonder he sees a radiance and cries out: 'What is this? What is this?'. All mystics — Hindu, Chistian, Sufi, and others — speak of this inner light.

As already noted, the Yogis speak of the three Nadis or nerves in the spine. The central one is the channel for spiritual energy. This is known as Sushumna. The one to the left is Ida and that to the right Pingala. All the three have their confluence at the base of the spine.

In the ordinary man the energy which gathers at the confluence of the three channels flows only through the two side ones and is expressed as ordinary worldly thoughts, feelings and activities. But in the Yogi, the current moves along the central channel. Ida and Pingala are like an electric lift or elevator. Kundalini is consciousness in its creative aspect as Power. It is the spiritual energy latent

in man. In the worldly man it remains like a coiled serpent. The task in spiritual life is to make this spiritual energy flow through Sushumna — the central spiritual channel. With the upward movement of the serpent power, the spiritual seeker, or rather the soul, rises to higher and higher planes of consciousness.

Purity essential

But the spiritual channel, though latent in every one, cannot be discovered without a certain degree of purity. Impurity is a great obstacle. The abuse of any of the bodily organs — sex, stomach, heart, brain, and others — creates obstruction and prevents the upward movement of the spiritual current. If all the energy flows along the side paths there is nothing left to carry us upwards. It is necessary to close the gateways of the lower channels with the help of well-regulated moral and spiritual life. Then the higher centres open up, enabling us to reach higher and higher planes of consciousnss until there is a new vision, a new peace, and a new sense of existence.

I once visited a well-known Indologist in Germany who gave lectures on the Kundalini Yoga, and found his wife painting the Chakras from Arthur Avalon's *Serpent Power*. I asked another Indologist, 'Don't you think it is dangerous to play with the serpent?' He laughed and replied, 'Swami, none of these people who listen to the lectures takes them too seriously.' However, I have known of some earnest but misguided souls ignorantly tampering with the serpent power and coming to grief.

Our teachers tell us: If you know how to use this serpent power properly, it will lead you to higher and

higher planes of consciousness, but if you do not awaken it in the right way, it may vomit poison.

In the course of spiritual evolution all the contents of the sub-conscious may come forth. An aspirant must have great moral and spiritual strength to stand it. Partial awakening is dangerous.

Japa — the infallible means

A disciple once asked Swami Brahmananda: 'Sir, how can the Kundalini be aroused?' The Swami replied, 'According to some, there are special exercises, but I believe it can best be done through repetition of the Divine Name, and meditation. Especially suited to our present age is the practice of Japa or constant repetion of the Divine Name and meditation upon it. There is no spiritual practice easier than this. But meditation must accompany the repetition of the Mantra (or the mystic word).'[10]

The body is like a stringed instrument. Each organ, each nerve centre has a music of its own. When we become conscious of our heart, we find that there is a kind of music that belongs to the heart. Hindu Yogis give the analogy of the snake-charmer who holds the snake with music. By playing various tunes he can make it rise up on end. This has a mystic significance. By creating a spiritual music, the latent power of the Kundalini can be awakened. The finer the music and the more spiritual the musician, the higher will the subtle power rise, until it reaches the highest and is united with the Supreme Spirit — the Soul of all souls.

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10. *The Eternal Companion.* P. 149.

The soul's union with the Oversoul

There is a very apt analogy in the Upanishads. The body is likened to a tree, on which two birds are dwelling, one at the top and the other at the bottom. The lower bird, forgetful of its higher nature, is busy tasting the fruits of the tree to satisfy its hunger. The sweet fruits make it happy. The bitter and sour ones make it miserable. It hops upward, branch by branch, comes closer to the higher bird, — the spectator unaffected by pleasure and pain — and becomes united with it. Similarly, the spiritual seeker feels himself separated until he rises upward and finds his soul united with the Oversoul.

In every spiritual path the first step is purification. Work and worship must become one, combined in a harmonious way of life. With the help of sincere devotion and meditation the soul becomes free from the bondage of the mind, and as it moves steadily from the lower to higher planes of consciousness, the limitations dissolve and the soul at last meets the Beloved, the Oversoul, on the plane of super-consciousness. The soul attains its union with Sat-Chit-Ananda or Eternal Existence-Consciousness-Bliss — the goal of all spiritual life.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW TO DE-HYPNOTISE OURSELVES

Swami Vivekananda's remark on De-hypnotisation

In the year 1896, when Swami Vivekananda spoke on 'The Vedanta Philosophy' at the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, one of the audience asked, 'Swami, I should like to ask whether you know of any people who have made any study of the principles of self-hypnotism, which they undoubtedly practised to a great extent in ancient India.' There are several forms of meditation that spiritual seekers practise, and as a result, they come to have a new awakening and experience of the Indwelling Spirit. Certain classes of people, to which the questioner belongs, call this process by the name Self-hypnotism. The Swami replied:

> "What you call hypnotism in the West is only a part of the real thing. . . .The Hindus say you are hypnotised already and that you should get out of it and de-hypnotise yourself."[1]

What happens when one de-hypnotises oneself really and truly? One comes to have the experience of the Spirit which is both immanent and transcendent. The Swami here quoted a verse of the Upanishads:

> "There the sun cannot illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars; the flash of lightning cannot illumine that, what to

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Vol. V. p. 227.

> speak of this mortal fire! That shining, everything else shines."[2]

By the light of the Spirit everything else shines. The Swami remarked: 'That is not hypnotization but de-hypnotisation.'

Hindu spiritual teachers tell us that ignorance, by creating the false ego and making us identify ourselves with it, has hypnotised us all. So, the goal of spiritual life is to get rid of ignorance, de-hypnotise ourselves, and realise our true Self—the Spirit.

This ideal the Swami elaborates in his Raja Yoga:

> "Through ignorance we have joined ourselves with a particular body, and thus opened ourselves to misery. This idea of body is a simple superstition. It is superstition that makes us happy or unhappy. It is superstition caused by ignorance that makes us feel heat and cold, pain and pleasure. It is our business to rise above this superstition, and the Yogi shows us how we can do this. It has been demonstrated that under certain mental conditions, a man may be burned, yet he will feel no pain. The difficulty is that this sudden upheaval of the mind comes like a whirlwind one minute, and goes away the next. If, however, we gain it through Yoga, we shall permanently attain to the separation of 'Self from the body'.

> "According to Yoga Philosophy it is through ignorance that the soul has been joined with nature. The aim is to get rid of nature's control over us. That is the goal of all religions. Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one or more

2. *Mundaka Upanishad*: II ; 2, 10.

of all these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details!.'[3]

Here the Swami quotes Patanjali, the ancient teacher of Yoga:

> "The means of destruction of ignorance is unbroken practice of discrimination" and comments on it; "This is the real goal of practice — discrimination between the real and the unreal, knowing that the Purusha is not nature, that it is neither matter nor mind, and that because it is and the unreal, knowing that the Purusha is not nature, that it is neither matter nor mind, and that because it is not nature, it cannot possibly change. It is only nature, which changes, combining and recombining, dissolving continually. When through constant practice we begin to discriminate, ignoranc will vanish, and the Purusha will begin to shine in its real nature, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent."[4]

This is the process of spiritual de-hypnotisation which brings about the direct experience of the Pure- Self-luminous Spirit—the Divine Principle in us, which is the Soul of souls.

Means for de-hypnotisation

Are we really all hypnotised? Are we all under some form of hypnotic spell? The answer, if we are to believe in our illumined men, must be in the affirmative. We are all actually under some form of hypnotism but we do not know it. Men of knowledge tell us that we are like the inebriate. We are like the hypnotic subject. We are even like the insane.

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3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Vol. I. Pp. 256-27.
4. *Ibid.* p. 258.

Whenever any stimulant was offered to the great Irish poet George Russel—better known as 'A'.E.'—he would decline it graciously saying: 'No, thank you. You see, I am already intoxicated.' Being already intoxicated he could not afford to have a drink. Can we really afford to have it?

Who is hypnotised and who is de-hypnotised?

If our Krishna, our Buddha, our Christ and our Ramakrishna, who saw the one Spirit shining in all and stood for intense spiritual disciplines, are de-hypnotised, then we ordinary people who see only the multiplicity, and even detest a life of self-control, are certainly hypnotised.

There is the anecdote of a father preaching a sermon to his son. The father was sitting in a beer hall in Germany, having plenty of drink. His son came to take him home. The father was in a very jovial mood and started giving his son some instructions: 'Look here, my boy, a gentleman never gets drunk.'..And the boy, in surprise, said: 'Papa, how do I know if one is drunk or not?' Pointing to the far side of the room the father said, 'Don't you see those two people sitting over there? When you start seeing them four, you know you are drunk.' The boy rubbed his eyes and thinking that he was not seeing the right thing said, 'Papa, but I see only one'. The man was already drunk and instead of seeing just one, was seeing two!

How much more drunk we, who are seeing many and not only two, must be? It is indeed a thought for reflection.

The question naturally arises: What guarantee is there that Christ, Budhha, Ramakrishna and other illumined souls are right and we are wrong? Why should the

experiences of the few be held true and the perceptions of the vast majority of countless millions considered false? Is this not against the rules of democracy?

May the Lord save us from this kind of democracy, The highest truth is not to be judged by any one's opinion—neither of the majority, nor of the minority. It is to be judged on its own merit.

According to our spiritual teachers, that alone is really true which persists under all circumstances, which frees the soul from bondage and limitation, which awakens spiritual consciousness, and brings immortality and bliss to the seeker of truth.

Different grades of Reality

Hindu spiritual teachers recognise various grades of reality. Something may be absoutely unreal and yet, with the help of our morbid fancy, we may take it to be real. When we take something fanciful to be real, it reacts on us as if it were real, but some day we shall be disillusioned. There may not be the slightest ground for entertaining an imagination, but still with our perverse minds we sometimes do so and suffer.

Another kind of reality is illustrated by the stock example of mistaking the rope for a snake in the dark. Or, the mother-of-pearl seen in darkness may be taken to be silver. We may see the mirage before us and, being thirsty, may run after it to quench our thirst. The mirage does not wet even a grain of sand, so how can it quench our thirst? It is an illusion, but we take the illusion to be real. Many of us are doing a similar thing in our lives when we should know better.

The mirage appears to be unreal on further examination. But the place where it appeared continues to be there. This is called 'empirical reality'—the reality we usually have to deal with. The reality of our body is of this kind. Suppose all of a sudden we are thrown into the spiritual mood—as some of us are at times—and feel the presence of the indwelling Spirit compared to which this body appears to be a shadow, a prison, or at best a temple—the dwelling house of God. But the old reality of the body has disappeared. We feel we are the Spirit. And when such a consciousness comes, the values of things change. We come to have a new attitude towards ourselves and towards others. When one, as Swami Vivekananda has said, gets this experience as a result of regular spiritual practices and disciplines, as a result of the practice of purity, that experience comes to stay, and has a tremendous transforming effect on the experiencer.

What is real and what is unreal?

The unreal is not something absolutely non-existent. No, it has a relative existence. By taking the unreal to be real, we make it relatively real, and create plenty of troubles for ourselves, may be even a heartbreak. It is good to have a heartbreak if that brings us a new awakening. This certainly is the hard way of learning the Truth. But, Truth has a tremendous transforming and healing effect. Even if it breaks our heart, it builds up a new heart, a spiritualized heart. How often we take the unreal to be real, and then suffer, and try to find imaginary remedies for imaginary troubles — troubles which have become real to us.

An inebriated gentleman was moving gently along the street carrying in his hand an empty box with perforations in the lid and sides. It appeared that he was carrying some live animal in it. An acquaintance stopped him and asked, 'What have you got in the box?' 'It is a mongoose', replied the tipsy one. 'What on earth for?' 'Well, you know how it is with me. I'm not vey drunk now, but I shall soon be, and when I am, I see snakes and am scared of them. That is what I have the mongoose for, to protect me'. 'But good heavens, those are imaginary snakes!' 'That is all right,' said the drunk reassuringly, 'this also is an imaginary mongoose!'

Similarly, all of us need an imagination to counteract another. When we take something imaginary to be real, we need another imagination to counteract the effect of the previous one. The difficulty with us is that we refuse to profit by our experiences and persist in building up a fool's paradise, even when they crash one after another and make us suffer no end of troubles. The real reason for all this is our refusal to be de-hypnotised. We prefer to be under the spell of some kind of hypnosis.

States of Consciousness

The teachers of Vedanta and Hindu psychologists speak of the four states of consciousness:

1. The dream state in which we seem to be transported into fantastic worlds where even what is considered impossible appears to be real.

2. The so-called waking state in which we often see things wrongly and base our speculation on false assumptions. It is in this state that we see the sun moving round the earth, take the rope lying in darkness for a snake and

feel frightened, take the mirage to be real and try to quench our thirst with its water.

3. The state of deep sleep in which our sense perceptions are suspended, the mind becomes blank and we become lost in the lap of unconsciousness.

4. The transcendental consciousness realised by an illumined soul in which he discovers the eternal verity ever remaining unchanged in the midst of false perception, wrong notions and suspension of all activities, mental and physical.

Dreams are all right as long as we dream, but on our waking, they become unreal. Again, if we have an experience of deep sleep, then from the view point of that state, both our waking and dream states appear to be unreal. In deep sleep, all phenomena are, as it were, suspended. But unfortunately, very few of us who get deep sleep know about it. From the point of view of the God-man's superconscious state, however, all the states of consciousness—waking, dreaming and deep sleep,—appear to be unreal; but as already mentioned, the unreal is not something absolutely non-existent.

The word *Maya* has been wrongly translated as Illusion. As Swami Vivekananda points out, when we take something to be real it is not illusion, but a statement of fact. But when we rise to another plane of consciousness the same thing appears to be unreal.

What is real persists under all circumstances, and has a tremendously transforming effect on those who realise it. It frees the soul from doubt, fear and misery and brings eternal pece and blessedness. In such illumined persons, we find an unbounded understanding, a tremendous sympathy and loving kindness towards all beings, patience and con-

tentment; and with all their spiritual knowledge, they are humble. Spiritual experience gives the soul a cosmo-centric instead of an ego-centric view of life. In short, illumined souls become de-hypnotised emotionally and spiritually.

The religious history of the world gives many illustrations of those who attained the highest illumination and spoke to all mankind of their experience. They have shown us the way to atiain them and achieve de-hypnotisation.

There is an ancient story in the Upanishads, the story of a young student, Narada. He had studied all the branches of learning—theology, the ancient scriptures, drama, art, sciences; he was a mine of learning. But with all that he felt disconsolate, and approaching a great spiritual teacher said: "Sir, with all my study, I am in great grief. I have only learned words, I have not known the Truth." What he meant was that mere words can never satisfy the soul. With great love the teacher gave this disciple instruction after instruction, took him from one stage to another, and finally told him, 'My dear boy, you are really searching for immortal bliss. Immortal bliss canot be had in anything finite. It can be realised only in the Infinite.'

Through purity of food, the mind becomes pure. But the food is not merely what we take through our mouth but also what is taken through our various senses and mind. All the food that we take must be pure and when we practise that purity, our memory of the Divine Reality becomes steady. Owing to ignorance and attachment the spirit forgets itself, but when the mind and heart become pure, the memory comes back. With the return of this memory, the spirit attains Self-realisation.

In the hypnotic state, we cannot discover the inner reality. But when we start getting de-hypnotised, the inner reality begins to shine forth in all its glory. This we find in the lives of great mystics.

Experiences of mystics

The great Christian mystics, St. Augustine—one of the greatest of the ancient Church Fathers—was, in the beginning a pleasure-loving youth. Then a tremendous change came over him and, as he prayed, a spiritual force which the mind itself was unable to grasp came to his assistance; it enabled him to look beyond the vortex of his ego and he saw something permeating his ego. He came directly in contact with God—the Divine Reality—who, as he said, 'precedes all human knowledge and exists independently of the ability of the human mind to know Him.' His prayer was 'I beseech Thee to discover to me myself.' The sinner became a saint. The ego-centric became cosmo-centric.

Rabbia, the lady mystic of Sufism, was sick. Two holy men visited her. One of them said: 'Whose prayer is pure, will God's chastiesement endure.' The other uttered his experience: 'He who loves his master's choice will in chastisement rejoice.' But Rabbia replied-: 'O men of grace, he who sees his Master's face, will not in his prayers recall that he is chastised at all!'[5] Rabbia would pray: 'O my Lord, if I worship from fear of hell, burn me in hell-fire. If I worship Thee from hope of paradise, exclude me from paradise. But if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thy eternal beauty.'

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5. Vide *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, pp. 43-44

When by following the path of worship and prayer, the spiritual seeker feels the living presence of God within his own soul as well as in all beings, the false ego which hypnotizes the soul disappears, yielding place to a new spiritual consciousness. He thus rises above the phenomenal existence and calculations and remains absorbed in God.

Chaitanya, in his earlier days, was a great scholar fond of disputations and discourses. But his meeting with the Vaishnava saint Isvara Puri at Gaya, and his visit to the temple there brought about a great change in him. Then he had visions in the temple which completely transformed him. He began to preach divine love, bringing light and devotion to many. He had de-hypnotized himself. 'Love for the name of God, compassion for all living beings and loving service to the devotees of the Lord' became his life-long message.

Typical of the modern young college student, Swami Vivekananda was at first sceptical about the existence of God in all beings and things. After the sudden death of his father, young Naredranath was passing through the most terrible days of poverty and suffering. His family was in great distress. He tried to find a job, went from office to office without any success. Those who, a few days ago, professed to be his friends now turned their face away from him. Seeing all this he sometimes wondered if the world was the creation of the devil. Some days there was not even enough food for the family and he left the house with the plea that he was invited to dine out and remained without food. He prayed for relief but without any response. Some days the doubt crossed his mind—Does God exist? And if so, does He really hear the fervent prayers of men in distress?

One evening after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain he was returning home tired in body and jaded in mind. Overpowered with the exertion he sank down on the outer plinth of a house on a roadside. Then, all of a sudden, he felt as if some divine powers were removing the coverings of his soul one after another. As the Swami narrated later on —"All my former doubts regarding the co-existenece of divine justice and mercy, and the presence of misery in the creation of a Blissful Providence were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all and was satisfied. As I proceeded homeward I found that there was no trace of fatigue in the body, and the mind was refreshed with wonderful strength and peace."[6]

De-hypnotised souls not only come to attain a new spirit of consciousness and joy, but this the compassionate ones try to share with their fellow beings.

Then we have the instance of a strange man of illumination — an illiterate one who had absolutely no secular education, and yet atained to the highest wisdom. Swami Adbhutananda was of a humble family. He was a house-boy. But Sri Ramakrishna noticed the boy's spiritual potentiality and took him under his care. There was a great spiritual awakening in the boy who, later on, attained great spiritual realisation and became a sage, a God-man.

When some one asked him if he could prove that God exists in everyone, he answered: 'Why not, but it is a subjective experience. Love cannot be explained to another. Only the one who loves understands it and also the one who is loved. It is the same with God; He knows, and the one whom He blesses knows. Man is ever conscious of the existence

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6. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 90.

of the Self. Every time he says. "My body, my mind, my intelligence," etc., he unconsciously admits an "I" — the Self. But he is unable to manifest his real nature. Hence the necessity of spiritual disciplines, and the firm will to unfold this latent divinity.'

This is exactly what the learned Vivekananda also taught. When the so-called literate and the illiterate experience the same Divine Spirit and draw their inspiration from the same Source, they speak the same language and give expression to the same spiritual ideal.

Discrimination— the way to de-hypnotisation

As we have seen, Patanjali declares that: 'The means of destruction of ignorance is unbroken practice of discrimination between the real and the unreal.'

The unreal hypnotises and the real de-hypnotises.

There are three kinds of knowledge:

1. The knowledge by which the illumined souls sees the One indestructible substance in all beings, the undivided in the divided. This is the Sattvic or spiritual knowledge— the knowledge of the highest kind.

2. The knowledge through which one sees all beings as various entities of different kinds, different from one another. This is the Rajasic type of knowledge and produces passion.

3. The knowledge that is confined to a particular thing, as if it were the whole. This is the Tamasic type of knowledge — a product of darkness and ignorance.[7]

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7. *The Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII ; 20, 21, 22.

Those who are de-hypnotised recognise the One in the many. Those who are partly de-hypnotised see the many only. But those who are fully hypnotised are so identified with one thing, that is sense objects, that they do not even recognise the many.

Our hypnotised minds play many tricks and keep us in bondage. The pure mind, on the other hand, tends to free the soul.

> 'It is the mind that is the cause of man's bondage and liberation. The mind that is attached to sense objects leads to bondage, while the mind that is detached from them leads to freedom.'[8]

Thus by dropping all attraction for material objects we can be de-hypnotised, illumined and liberated. So why not drop all false desires which intoxicate and, de-hypnotise us? The question is: Can we do it?

The great Quaker, William Penn, was exhorting a drunkard to cast off his drinking habit. The latter lamented that this was impossible. 'No', said Penn, 'It is as easy as opening thy hand, friend.' 'Tell me how this is, and I will do so you say,' replied the drunkard. 'Friend, when thee finds any vessel of intoxicating liquor in they hand, open the hand that contains it, before it reaches thy mouth, and thee will never be drunk again.'

Ignorance and worldly desires are like intoxicating liquor to us all. Let us learn the secret of dropping the liquor and become de-hypnotised, sober, illumined and free.

But the casting off of the old habit is not an easy matter. The habit does not go easily. Hence the need for steady

8. *Brahmabindupanishad*, I: 2.

spiritual disciplines under the guidance of a competent teacher.

The process of hypnotisation and de-hypnotisation

Sri Ramakrishna describes, in one of his parables, how self-forgetfulness brought about by ignorance can yield place to self-realisation by our following the spiritual path under the guidance of a competent teacher:

Once a tigress attacked a herd of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The kind shepherd allowed the cub to grow among the goats. It saw the kids suck the mother goat's milk, and did the same. Following the example of the goats it learnt to eat grass and also to bleat, although it grew into a big tiger.

Some time after, another tiger attacked the flock and was surprised to find a tiger behaving just like a goat! The wild animal caught hold of the bleating tiger, dragged it to a brook in the forest and asked it to look at its image in the water and then at his face. The other tiger did as bidden and found that the two faces looked alike. Then a little meat was forced into its mouth. The tiger from the forest said: "Look, you are not a goat, you are a tiger like me. So come away with me.'

The greass-eating tiger finally realised its tiger-nature and followed the other to the forest.

Sri Ramakrishna had heard his monk Guru say, commenting on the story: "Eating grass is like enjoying the objects of lust and greed. To bleat and run away like a goat is to behave like an ordinary man. Going away with the new tiger is like taking shelter with the Guru, who awakens one's spiritual consciousness, and recognising him alone as

one's relative. To see one's face rightly is to know one's real Self."[9]

The hypnotised soul does not lose its real nature although, owing to ignorance, it forgets it for the time being. With the dispelling of ignorance, it comes to be de-hypnotised and regains its true spiritual nature.

Let us follow in the footsteps of our illumined teachers and attain to true spiritual experience and freedom.

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9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 306-307.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Religion is realization

"Religion is a question of fact, not of talk," says Swami Vivekananda emphatically, and continues, "we have to analyse our own souls to find what is there. We have to understand it and to realize what is understood. That is religion. No amount of talk will make religion. . . .This is one great idea to learn and to hold on to, this idea of realization. The turmoil and difference in religions will cease only when we understand that religion is not in books, and in temples. It is an actual perception. Only the man who has actually perceived God and soul has religion."[1]

Indeed the central theme in religion is spiritual realization, experience of the ultimate Reality, call it God, Jehova, Allah, Tao, or what you will. And this spiritual experience is certainly mysterious. Rightly does Sri Krishna declare in the Bhagavad Gita: "Some look on the Self, the Supreme Spirit, as a wonder; some speak of it as a wonder; still others, though hearing, do not understand it at all."[2]

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.* II, p. 163.

2. *The Bhagavad Gita,* II: 9.

Pseudo-religious experiences

It is so said because there is a great misunderstanding about the meaning of spiritual realization and people sometimes mistake a psychic for a spiritual experience. I knew a Dutch lady whose eyes during meditation were so stimulated that she would see sparks. She thought she was having a wonderful spiritual realization until I told her that such experiences mean little in spiritual life; then she soon lost interest and stopped coming to the Centre.

Another highly imaginative lady saw the form of a holy personality which brought her a kind of satisfaction and she thought so highly of her vision that she spoke of it to many and did everything to circulate the news short of publishing it in the newspaper. After a while her worldly tendencies began to assert themselves, she succumbed to these and created trouble for herself and others connected with her. Visions by themselves mean little unless there is a background of purity. We need purity of thought and emotion rather than visions, which come by themselves when the time is ripe. The tree is judged by its fruits.

It is not only women who let their imaginations run riot. A man who had read the life of Sri Ramakrishna, unconsciously started to imitate him and saw visions of the Divine Mother in the form of a young girl he knew. He started indulging in morbid imaginations in connection with her. Knowing something of the working of his mind, I asked him to stop this kind of meditation and suggested a method that I felt would be better for him, but he had thought so highly of his revelation that for a while he was bitterly disappointed and complained that I did not appreciate him. For a time he lost faith in my instructions, but he was all right later.

Our minds play no end of tricks, and we must be on our guard, for unless we succeed in awakening the true introspective power we can never evaluate correctly the states of mind that accompany meditation. If we first pay attention to moral practice, then in due time through spiritual practice we shall arrive at true spiritual realization. There are no short-cuts. That is why all the great teachers have emphasized the necessity of concentrating first on moral life and building up a strong character before one can expect to attain any kind of spiritual experience.

I knew a spiritually inclined young man who once drank a little liquor in a party when he was in what he called a spiritual mood. This way he succeeded in cutting himself off for a while from the outside world and got a glimpes of a vast state of existence which made a tremendous impression upon him, but the experience was too sudden and brought about a disturbance in the personality in which the lower nature was no longer controlled by the higher. Regular spiritual disciplines would have prevented this but he would not take the trouble to practise them and consequently passed through a strange abnormal state swinging between the sublime and the ridiculous.

Purity—the essential need

The Hindu sages teach us how to practise yoga in order to purify mind and heart and place our feet securely upon the spiritual way to God. Remember what Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." This is the first teaching of all real religion. When the cloud is dispelled the light shines forth. Those who have read the life of Mahatma Gandhi have learnt of his unique struggle

for the attainment of purity. With great humility he says in his autobiography:

> "I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. . . . Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that He alone is real and all else unreal. . . . It is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him, who as I fully know, governs every breath of my life and whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him."[3]

God can never be realised by one who is not pure of heart. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action.

The kind of psychic or psychopathic delusions described above are very different from such glimpses of divinity as all the great saints and sages have experienced and written about. When deeper glimpses like that of Gandhi follow sincere striving for purity and are followed by further striving, they lead the soul slowly and steadily toward the highest self-realization.

Genuine mystic experiences

St. Augustine's mother was a woman of high spiritual development who later was regarded also as a saint. Once when the son was having a mystical conversation with her he felt that all his tumult of the flesh was stilled and in the ensuing silence his wakeful mind beheld the ultimate face

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3. *An Autobiography* or *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, M. K. Gandhi. Introduction.

of wisdom. This fleeting contact left a permanent mark on his life and thought.

When the resurrected Christ appeared to St. Theresa in all his sacrosanct humanity, in unspeakable majesty and beauty, it was no ordinary vision. It had a powerful purifying and transforming effect.

As mentioned before, young Vivekananda could not see how everything in the universe is of God until Ramakrishna touched him. He realized in a flash that there is nothing in the universe other than God and was stupefied. He described it afterwards as a glimpse of the monistic state, the real Advaita or complete unity of all life and matter, an experience which led him directly to the Absolute. When he returned to consciousness he found the Absolute in everything, and this became the starting point for a remarkable spiritual life. He had both the transcendental and immanent realisation of the Godhead to whom he immediately dedicated the rest of his life so that in later years he was able to impart such glimpses to some of his own disciples.

Even the great Swami Brahmananda did not at first attain to any sense of reality in his solitary meditations. It was under the inspiration of Ramakrishna that he saw his Chosen Ideal, living and luminous, a personal aspect of the Godhead. That was the beginning of a unique spiritual life of marvellous realizations and tremendous power that could transform other lives.

What is spiritual realization?

To mere humble spiritual seekers who are not eligible for full realization, even a glimpse, however faint, may

bring a positive convinction of the reality of spiritual existence. This Reality we should strive to experience with the help of steady and intense moral and spiritual practices. Let us have a clear conception of the spiriutal realisation which the greatest mystics of the world hold before us. There is an ancient Hindu saying: "The money that we find in our dreams will not buy food in our waking state." We must have money in our waking state also so that we may buy food, appease our hunger, and get nourished.

Sri Ramakrishna made the point clear when his disciple Vivekananda asked him, "Do you believe in God, Sir?" "Yes," answered Sri Ramakrishna. "Can you prove it, Sir?" persisted the disciple. Again came the answer in a very firm "Yes." The disciple asked, "How?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense." It is this idea that Swami Vivekananda expresses when he says: "When you see religion or God in a most intense sense, then you see the internal world, nothing will be able to shake your belief."[4] The Master speaks in the same strain in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:*

> "Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a Jnani. But he who has drunk it has Vijnana, that is to say fuller knowledge of it. . . .After having the vision of God one talks to Him as if He were an intimate relative. That is Vijnana. . . .The Vijnani sees that Brahman is immovable and beyond all activity. He sees further that He manifests Himself as Bhagavan, the Personal God. Living beings, the universe, mind, intelligence, love, renunciation, know-

4. Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* Vol. IV, p. 175.

ledge, all these are the manifestations of His power. The Vijnani retains the 'I' of the devotee, the 'I' of the Jnani, in order to taste that bliss of God and teach people."[5]

Once he asked a disciple: "What will you gain by merely being intuitively aware of God's existence? A mere vision of God is by no means everything. You have to bring Him into your room. You have to talk to Him. Some have seen the king, but only one or two can bring the king home and entertain Him." What Sri Ramakrishna meant was that realisation includes both transcendental and immanent aspects until one sees Him in all His varied manifestations, personal and impersonal.

Many of you have read that epoch-making work by William James *The Varieties of Religious Experience* What was it that made this great pragmatic psychologist deeply interested in mysticism, in spiritual experience? "In the Adirondacks one night," Rufus Jones tells us, "in 1898, William James, had an experience which was, to quote his own words, 'the most memorable of all my memorable experiences. I got into a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description.' He was deeply impressed by 'its intense appeal and its everlasting freshness'. He felt sure that much of the Edinburgh lectures later published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, were traceable to it. It brought him 'a triumphant sense of certainty'[6]

In the words of Swami Vivekananda: "Religion is the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God." All the mystics have sought to realise this eternal

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 368, 30 and 434.
6. *A Call to what is Vital*, Rufus Jones, p. 410.

relationship in order to achieve what St. Paul referred to when he said: "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me. Only when I become as nothing can God enter in, and no difference between his life and mine remains outstanding.' There is a personal Christ and also a cosmic Christ immanent in all life. The soul and the oversoul merge, as the river merges into the ocean at its mouth. William James expresses the same ideal in the words: "This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystical achievement."[7] We find this experience in all mystics. When the poet Whitman wrote: "Swift arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all arguments of the earth," he referred to an experience that brought about a tremendous change in his life and art. Because he was so different from those around him, he was called an eccentric.

Tennyson, his great English contemporary, gives voice to a similar experience in his poetic words:

> The mortal limit of the self was loosed
> And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud
> Melts into heaven. I touched my limbs—the limbs
> Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
> But utter clearness, and thro' loss of Self
> The gain of such large life as matched with ours
> Were Sun to spark—[8]

From shadow to Reality

According to all schools of Vedanta, ignorance hides the Truth. "In that which is night to all beings, the man

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7. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, p. 410

8. *The Ancient Sage*, Lord Tennyson.

of self-control is awake: and where all beings are awake, there is the night for the sage who sees."[9]

To the unillumined man, deluded by ignorance, the Supreme Reality is non-existent. To him his world is all that exists. But to the illumined soul the Infinite Spirit is the only Reality. The world, and even human personality appear to be a shadow of the Reality.

Plato in his *Republic* speaks of men and women living in a sort of underground cave where they have been chained since childhood. They have their legs and heads chained so that they cannot turn their heads. Above and behind them burns a fire which throws their shadows on the wall of the cave before their eyes. Naturally the prisoners, having known nothing else, take these shadows to be real. At last one of them is compelled to throw off his chains and turn his head to look at the light. He is distressed by the glare and for a while inclined to continue looking upon the shadows as real but when he is dragged up and forced into the presence of the sun, he gradually becomes accustomed to the sight of the upper world. At first he sees the shadows best, then reflections of men and other objects in the water, finally the objects themselves. Then he gazes upon the moon and the stars and finds them easier to look upon than the sun by day. At last he learns to look diectly at the sun itself.

The moral is that mental purity and spiritual illumination both should proceed step by step. To be suddenly brought into the domain of the spirit is confusing to those who are not previously trained. But there is no such trouble in the case of those who have disciplined themselves properly.

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9. *The Bhagavad Gita*, II: 69.

Mighty experiences of the Mighty

Sri Ramakrishna had a nephew named Hriday who used to attend on him. He was eager to attain spiritual illumination and pressed Sri Ramakrishna for a vision. "All right, let the Mother's will be done. It was She who revolutionised my mind and made me pass through all stages of realisation. If She wills, you too shall have visions." That evening Hriday saw Sri Ramakrishna's body disappear, to be replaced by a luminous body, the effulgence of which radiated in all directions. He looked down at his own body and found that it, too, had become luminous. Both were manifestations of the same Spirit. Overwhelmed with joy, Hriday rushed to his uncle: "You and I are of one stuff," he shouted, "we are not men. Come, let us go from place to place and save people from their misery." Ramakrishna touched his chest and brought him back to normal. "You raise such a storm over one trifling vision. I see countless visions at all hours of the day but do I make a fuss over them? You are not yet fit to see them. Keep quiet now and you will see more when the time comes."[10]

Shallow emotionalism vs. *Basic transformation of Character*

There are spiritual regions which have a tremendous effect on mind and body. We learnt from the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who told us that toward the close of the Master's life some of those who came to him used to fall into trances accompanied by contortions, tears and great flow of emotion. Swami Vivekananda, however, did

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10. Abridged and adapted from: *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 235.

not experience any such states and asked the Master why this was. "My son, do not be disturbed," was the reply. "When an elephant walks into a shallow pond a great commotion is set up, but if it goes into the water of the Ganges there is little disturbance of the surface. These devotees are like small ponds but you are like the mighty river."[11]

Swami Vivekananda told the young devotees that effusion of sentiment which is not attended by a corresponding transformation of character is not strong enough to destroy worldly cravings and awaken spiritual consciousness and is therefore of no real value in spiritual life. Ignorant people think that outward symptoms are indications of deep spiritual fervour, and instead of practising restraint, devotion and renunciation, they cultivate emotional states with the result that their weakened nerves respond to the slightest emotional stimulus. If this is allowed to go unchecked the result may be physical and mental disaster. Out of a hundred aspirants, eighty may become charlatans, fifteen may go insane and only the remaining five may be blessed with a vision of the real Truth. The great teachers urge their disciples to strive first for purity of mind and attain that transformation of character and life which is the first essential for spiritual realization. If we follow slowly and steadily the path to spiritual culture we shall surely come to realise the true Self — the Self of all.

The unveiling of the mystery of Spiritual Realization

The unillumined man is unaware of the Self — the inmost Reality, and is identified with the body, senses,

11. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 111.

mind, ego, and the outside world. The Self which is the Light of Consciousness remains unrecognized, and so it remains a great mystery. But it is always there.

Spiritual consciousness leads us to that sense of unity which results from the realisation that the light of which we become aware in our own hearts is the same as the Light that surrounds us, and that we know as God. As the Upanishads have it: "Both the individual self and the Universal Self have entered the core of the heart, the abode of the Most High. The knowers of Brahman see a difference between them as between sunshine and shadow."[12]

The relation between the soul and the Oversoul has been likened to the visible spectrum and the light waves which lie beyond the red and violet, beyond human vision. As William James observes: "The conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come."[13] Sri Ramakrishna says: "The body is like a tray; the mind and buddhi are like water. The Sun of Satchidananda is reflected in this water. Meditating on the reflected sun, one sees the Real Sun through the grace of God." If the water is dirty and disturbed it must be purified and calmed before it can reflect the light. Meditating on the reflected light with earnestness, one comes to realise the True Light.

As the Upanishad declares: "The Self is not known through the study of the scriptures, nor through the subtlest intellect, nor through much learning; but He is known by him who longs for Him. Verily, unto him does the Self reveal Its true being."[14]

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12. *The Katha Upanishad*, II. 3:21
13. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, p. 505.
14. *The Mundaka Upanishad*, III: 2.iii.

We read of the Sufi mystic Bayazid and his experience of God:

> "When God, the most glorious, perceived the sincerity of my desire for Him, He called to me saying: 'O my chosen one, come near unto Me. Ascend the heights of My Glory, climb the planes of My Splendour and sit upon the carpet of my Holiness.'"
>
> "With that I began to melt away as metal dissolves in fire. Then He gave me to drink from the fountain of Grace and transformed me beyond description. He stopped my exterior vision and taught me to see within. He made me dead to my own existence and alive to His own. He took me to Truth. I looked at it through Him. Then I saw Him truly. When I sang His praise with the tongue given by His Grace, when I realized knowledge through His Knowledge, and beheld through His Light, He said to me: 'Bayazid, only see! When nothing exists, all, all exists.'"

Suso, a Christian mystic shares with us this rare experience of his:

> "The Spirit dies and yet is all alive in the marvels of the Godhead and is lost in the stillness of the glorious dazzling obscurity and of the naked, simple unity. It is in this modeless that the highest bliss is to be found."

God appears when the ego dies. Through Divine Will some souls descend to the human plane with the spiritualised ego and promote the welfare of mankind. To quote the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

> "There are some who come down, as it were, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman — after Samadhi — and retain the 'ego of knowledge' or the 'ego of devotion' just as there are people who, after their own sweet will,

stay in the market-place after the market breaks up. This was the case with sages like Narada. They kept the 'ego of devotion' for the purpose of teaching men. Sankarcharya kept the 'ego of knowledge' for the same purpose."[15]

Swami Vivekananda adds:

"This little separate self must die. Then we shall find that we are in the Real, and that the Reality is God, and He is our own true nature and He is always in and with us. Let us live in Him and stand in Him. It is the only joyful state of existence. Life on the plane of the Spirit is the only life, and let us all try to attain to this realisation."[16]

Although the God-men appear to descend to the relative plane for the good of mankind they really remain established in the highest spiritual consciousness and joy even when they are actively engaged in bringing light and knowledge to their fellow beings and promoting the welfare of all.

These are our greatest spiritual teachers. Let us strive to follow in their footsteps and attain spiritual realisation.

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15. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 111.
16. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 174.

CHAPTER XV

THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL VIBRATION

The two basic materials of the Universe

Swami Vivekananda, speaking of vibrations in his book *Raja Yoga*, says that according to the philosophers of India, the whole universe is composed to two materials, one of which they call *Akasa* which is the omnipresent, all-penetrating existence. Everything that has form, everything that is the result of combination, is evolved out of this Akasa. It is the Akasa that becomes the air, that becomes the liquids, that becomes the solids, and the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars and the comets; it is the Akasa that becomes the human body, the animal body, the plants, in fact, every form that we see, everything that can be sensed, everything that exists.

By what power is this Akasa manufactured into this universe? By the power *Prana*. Just as Akasa is the infinite, omnipresent material of the universe, so is the Prana the infinite, omnipresent manufacturing power of the universe. Prana manifests as motion, gravitation, magnetism; it also manifests as the actions of the body, as the nerve currents, as thought force. From thought down to the lowest force everything is but a manifestation of Prana. The sum total of all forces in the universe, mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state, is called Prana.

Control of Prana

"Gain control of this vital force and you a gain control over the body. It is possible to control Prana in every part of the body, and it is even possible to influence others. If your body is in a certain state of tension, there may be a tendency to produce the same condition in others. For example, if you are strong and healthy, those who live with you will have a tendency to be strong and healthy. On the other hand, if you are sickly, those around you will receive the influence. When the healer seeks to cure an ill person, his first idea is to transfer his own health to the other, but that is a primitive way of thinking. A strong man may actually make a weak person a little stronger, whether he consciously tries to do so or not. Again, a man who is far from being healthy himself can nevertheless bring health to another. That is because he can increase the rate of vibration of his own Prana until it is transmitted to another. But this depends upon purity.

"The pure man who has the power to bring his own Prana into a certain state of vibration, can arouse a similar state of vibration in some one else. We see this demonstrated in every day life; I am engaged right now in bringing my mind into a certain state of mental vibration, and the greater my success, the more will you be affected by what I say. The more earnest I am, the more you will derive from my lecture. But if I lack interest, so will you. The great leaders, the world-movers and shakers, have learned how to bring their Prana into a high state of vibration, so that others are drawn towards them and are led to think as they think. They had the most wonderful control of the Prana which gave the tremendous will power and power to sway the world."[1]

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 147 *ff*.

The meaning of vibration

What do we mean by vibration? A lady was talking to her friend. She said: "When you awake you are in a certain state of vibration; when you dream you are in another; when you are rested after a good sleep you are in another. And when you are angry, or feeling miserable, or happy, all these are states of vibration. Some people get on your nerves, and you may have the same effect on them. You may not like the vibrations of some people, may be allergic to them, as they to yours."

The listener lost her patience. "If you a use that word vibration again," she said, "I'll scream." But the speaker, undaunted, remarked, "Even your scream would be a state of vibration."

Now let us discuss the subject a little more seriously. Instead of screaming, perhaps we may find means of making our vibrations spiritual and harmonious, not only for ourselves but for those with whom we associate.

Vibration is motion within a body which reaches out and brings reaction in other bodies coming in contact with it. What we receive through our senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell forming various impressions, are all vibrations. Sound, heat, gas, liquid, solids, sun, moon, stars, earth — all have vibrations of their own. And our own senses vibrate in different ways at different times, so that our reactions also vary.

Modern scientific thought has revolutionized our conception of matter. An atom is no longer held to be the ultimate constituent, but is itself composed of electrons, protons, neutrons — all forms of electrical waves. So what was once considered as inert matter is now known

to be "a structure of energy units, revolving with immense velocity in space-time". Some eminent thinkers go so far as to say that "this universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine". And again, they say, "The stuff of the world is mind-stuff."

Here we find an echo of the Hindu cosmological theory which declares that both mind and matter are products of a much finer material, of which the mind is a subtle product and physical matter a grosser one.

Experiments of Prof. J. C. Bose

During our college days we were struck by some of the delicate experiements made by the physicists trained in the school of the great scientist, Sir J. C. Bose. With the help of supersensitive instruments he had demonstrated that a piece of so-called 'dead' sheet metal, plant fibre, and animal muscle react to outside stimuli in more or less similar ways, the difference being only in degree, not in kind. Most enchanting were the experiments made with sensitive plants, particularly the mimosa, the leaves of which droop at the slightest touch. They react very much as human beings do to burns, cuts, abrasions, alcohol and poison. Professor Bose found that plants have a kind of nervous system, and even indicate somethihg akin to mental responses, including the tendency to get drunk. When Professor Bose lectured in London it is reported that George Bernard Shaw, the great vegetarian, felt extremely uncomfortable when the scientist demonstrated that, on being pinched and pierced, raw carrots gave violent electric signals, corresponding to man's cries for help! The scientist remarked that he was demonstrating experimentally what his Hindu ancestors called the 'One

Principle of Life', which pulsates and vibrates in manifold forms throughout the entire universe.

The three Gunas or cosmic forces

How did the ancient Hindus discover this active Principle? Intuitively or physically? Divine into the very depths of their being, and into the nature of things, the seers discovered the infinite power of the Supreme Spirit hidden in the *Gunas,* or cosmic forces—*Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*. In symbolic language they expressed their experience of this infinite power:

> "There is one unborn female, the mother, which produces manifold off-spring. The one Power, consisting of threefold cosmic forces, brings the manifold universe into being."[2]

According to the Hindu cosmologists, on the relative plane there are two principles. The first is the sentient or pure spiritual principle, and the second, the insentient power or force in which the sentient spirit is immanent. In the great hymns of the *Rig-Veda* we read:

> "Motionless did the Supreme Spirit vibrate alone in its glory. Beyond that nothing did exist. Creative then became the glory with self-sustaining principle below and creative energy above."[3]

Thus did Prana manifest itself and the whole cosmic process come into being. Through the action and interaction of Akasa — the omnipresent, subtlest material substance—and Prana, the cosmic energy, there came into

2. The *Svetaswatara Upanishad.* IV: 5.
3. X: 129.

being the ego, mind, senses and what we call matter, both cosmic and individual. And so we find the One Infinite Spirit, which is immanent in everything, manifesting itself as the Cosmic Being or Iswara, possessing a subtle and a gross body, and we also find the individual soul putting on the coverings of both a subtle and a gross body. All bodies, gross or subtle, are products of Akasa acted upon by Prana, the cosmic energy; and just as we have our own individual body, which is part of the great cosmic body, so do we have our little individual minds which are parts of the all-pervading cosmic mind. Both the individual and the cosmic body and mind are vibrating with the cosmic energy called Prana. Conscious of intense cosmic vibration, the seer of the Upanishads says:

> "Whatever exists in this universe vibrates within the Prana."[4]

The nature of this cosmic energy is to move. What appears to be static is only a low rate of vibration; what appears dynamic is moving at an intense rate of vibration. The Sanskrit word for Universe, Jagat, is derived from the root, *Gam,* which means 'to move, to change, to swing to and fro, to vibrate'. The universe is in a constant states of vibration and, as Swami Vivekananda says, very rightly:

> "It is the Prana that is manifesting as motion; it is the Prana that is manifesting as gravitation, as magnetism, as electricity, as light. It is the Prana that is manifesting as the actions of the body, as the nerve currents, as thought force."[5]

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4. *Katha Upanishad.* II: 6: 2.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Vol. I. p. 148.

It is very important for us to remember that our mind, with all its faculties for thinking, feeling, and willing, is a substance. Our thoughts, feelings, and wills are like waves in the mind and are things as real, if not more so, than physical matter, and these states of mind are vibrations of one rate or another. Can the rate of vibration be controlled?

The Upanishads tell us that there are three rates of vibration, modes, corresponding to three colours — white, red, and black. Black stands for *Tamas* or dull forces; Red for *Rajas,* the tense forces of passion and desire and greed; White indicate *Sattva*, the harmonious forces of purity. Tamas produces darkness, negligence and delusion; Rajas, worldly activity, enterprise and ambition, marked by restlessness and dissatisfaction; and Sattva brings about knowledge, compassion, right-mindedness and devotion.[6]

Plato and the Gunas

These ideas are strange to Western minds, but they were familiar to Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher. In his *Republic* he speaks of three active principles wnhich the calls Epithumia, Thumos and Logistikon, corresponding, in this order, to Tamas, Rajas and Sattva. The first force, Epithumia, is, he says ,a multiplicity of blind appetites or, desires which dominate the votaries of sensuous enjoyments and whose chief aim is the gratification of animal appetites. Thumos, like the Hindu Rajas, dominates the man of action who works with frenzied zeal for distinction or worldly poisition and power; grasping and greedy, such a man is filled with restless unhappiness. Logistikon, like Sattva, represents the rational elements characterising the philosopher

6. Cf. *The Bhagavad Gita*, XIV: 5-13.

and sage, such as detachment, moderation, purity and harmony.

These three types of forces are at work within us at all times. When we say that a person has too much Tamas we mean that the dull, dark forces overshadow, for the time being, the other two types. When a person is ruled by passion and desire we say that Rajas is predominant. If his life is peaceful and harmonious, if he seems to have detached himself from worldly desires, we say that Sattva rules. These are the three Gunas.

How to realize the Spirit which is beyond Gunas

Now the ultimate goal of spiritual life is to go beyond the Gunas and realize the Supreme, Transcendent Spirit. In order to reach this state we need more and more of Sattva. We must live morally, trying to be pure in thought, word and deed. As body, mind and soul are purified and we become established in the moral life, we conquer dullness and tension. We become more harmonious and steady, and can help others to rise also. The low vibrations of the impure mind are harmful to him as well as to others. They affect him like poison fumes and may infect others, bringing depression, restlessness and unsteadiness. On the other hand, the finer vibrations of the pure person elevate him and those who come in contact with him. Sattva is the stepping-stone to the Transcendental State.

Vibrations—good and bad

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find how he was unable to drink a cup of water brought to him by an apparently

decent-looking man who, it was discovered, was leading an impure life. Swami Vivekananda relates how, when his own vibrations were bad, the Master could not take food from his hands. Vivekananda himself was a man of shining purity, but sometimes he had to associate with various types of people, and the evil vibrations of some of them seemed for a while to stick to him so that there arose occasions when the Master could not but feel the contamination.

Vibrations can be changed, the impure can become pure. Whenever we find that Rajas or Tamas is predominant in our lives, we can learn to tune ourselves to the harmony of Sattva and gradually change our vibrations.

The God-man's loving vibrations have a transofrming power that awakens the latent spiritual consciousness of others.

The transforming power of illumined Souls

During the height of spiritual realization, the soul transcends the Gunas and becomes free from desires. It is after this experience that perfect purity is attained and vibrations are fully spiritualized. The fully illumined alone possess the mighty spiritual power capable of transforming many, for they have become clear channels for the flow of Divine Grace and Power. However, to the extent one attains illumination and is established in moral qualities, one feels inner harmony and peace, and is able to radiate vibrations for the benefit of others.

There are many types and degrees of spiritual power. There are the silent, illumined souls who, by their spiritual vibrations, thoughts and emotions, fertilize the mental world and make it easier for others to lead a truly spiritual life.

Again, there are the dynamic ones who become actively engaged in promoting the welfare of others. We know only those who, by their powerful vibrations, influence mankind in a tangible way. Patanjali, in one of his aphorisms, says:

> "In the presence of one who is established in non-injury, love, sympathy, compassion, all enmities cease."[7]

Buddha's compassion was based on Supreme Illumination. A foolish man, not knowing that Buddha observed the principle of love which commends the return of good for evil, abused him. Buddha silently pitied his folly. When the man had finished, Buddha asked him, "Son, if a man declines to accept a present made to him, to whom would it belong?" "To the man who offered it," was the reply. Then said the Buddha quietly, "I decline to accept your abuse. A wicked man who reproaches a virtuous one is like one who looks up and spits at the heaven; the spittle soils not the heaven, but comes back and defiles his own person." The abuser turned away, ashamed. Later he came back and took refuge in the Buddha.

Divini, a great poet of his time, in Italy, heard a sermon by St. Francis of Assisi, "What foolish raving is this!' he thought at first, in his arrogance, but as the saint spoke, the poet was fascinated by the beauty of the message. He went down on his knees before him and begged: "Peace, oh, give me peace." The saint said, "Arise, come with us, Brother Pacificus, brother of peace." The touch of the saint eventually worked a great change in the poet and thereafter his writing reflected a peace of mind he had never known before.

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7. *Yoga Sutras*. II: 35.

Once Swami Vivekananda felt the surge of divine energy and power in himself even during the lifetime of his Master. "Come, touch me," he said to a brother monk, and the latter experienced something like an electric shock and felt a tremendous transformation taking place within him. But Vivekananda was warned by the Master not to waste this precious energy until he had gathered enough for himself.

Later, when Swami Vivekananda came to be established in the highest spiritual consciousness, he became also a repository of a tremendous spiritual power of transforming others. In Madras he once met a young Assistant Professor of science who professed to be an atheist and went on vehemently arguing with the Swami for a time. In a deep spiritual mood the Swami touched the person of the arguer and brought about a remarkable change in him. Speaking of him the Swami used to say jocularly, "Caesar said 'I came, I saw, I conquered', but Kidi came, he saw and was conquered!' Theneceforward the so-called atheist became an ardent devotee of God, and devoted himself to the Swami's cause by becoming the honorary manger of the magazine—*Prabuddha Bharata* originally started in Madras. He renounced the world and lived a saintly life. The Swami's spiritual vibrations overpowered the unspiritual vibrations of the young man and raised the spiritual ones instead, thereby transforming him completely.[8]

We came across a remarkable incident of how a young man of Calcutta who came under the influence of vicious

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda.* p. 272.

company, became an addict to intoxicants and took to evil ways, was completely transformed by Swami Premananda, one of the greatest of Swami Vivekananda's brother disciples. His relatives and friends abandoned all hopes of his recovery and begged Swami Premananda to wean him away from his evil associates and habits. The Swami's heart was filled with love and sympathy. One day he met the boy in his own home and invited him to visit the Belur Math where the Swami stayed. The young man came one day and seemd to have enjoyed his visit. With great tenderness the Swami asked him to come again. After several visits a great change came over him. Greatly surprised at the Swami's love he thought within himself, "How could he treat with such unparalleled affection one who became a source of shame and disgrace even to his relatives and was shunned by them all? Wonderful indeed is his love." In due course he gave up the evil path, became deeply spirit-tually inclined and came to the Swami to lead the life of renunciation and service.

However, not so much for changing others, as for transforming ourselves and bringing peace to our soul, we need spiritual vibrations within ourselves.

How to spiritualise our vibrations

We have already answered the question. We must spiritualise our thoughts, emotions and actions. We are like radio sets and must tune ourselves rightly. If we let ourselves become dull, we are a prey to dull forces. If we are tuned tensely, we are at the mercy of disturbing forces. We must learn to tune ourselvees through spiritual disciplines and thus create harmonious conditions within ourselves.

Then we rise higher and higher and reach that spiritual consciousness which transcends all vibrations.

By living a life of purity under the influence of Sattva, the spiritual aspirant attains cheerfulness of mind, concentration, conquest of organs, and fitness for the realisation of the Self. If we wish to grow in spirit ourselves and wish others to do so too, let us follow in the footsteps of illumined souls, and undergo strict moral and spiritual practices with intelligence, steadiness, and resignation to the will of the Supreme Spirit.

CHAPTER XVI

THE REALITY BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

Discourse of an Ancient Sage

In ancient days there was a wise houeholder named Yajnavalkya wo had attained to the highest knowledge. His wife Maitreyi also was greatly devoted to the spiritual ideal. The time came for this sage to renounce the world; so he called his wife to him and said:

> "My dear, I am resolved to begin a life of renunciation. I propose, therefore, to hand over all my property to you." The wife replied, "My lord, if I possess all your wealth, shall I also attain immortality?" "No", answered the sage, "your life would be that of the rich, and none can possibly hope to gain immortality through wealth." To this the wife rejoined, "Then what need have I of wealth? I would rather learn about the way to immortality."
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> In his reply, the sage delivered a famous discourse; "Dear to me you have always been, Maitreyi, and the time has come for me to reveal to you that truth which is nearest to my heart. Come, sit beside me, and I will explain to you. It is not for the sake of the husband, my beloved, that the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the wife, my beloved, that the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the children, my beloved, that the children are dear, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the creatures, my beloved, that the creatures are dear, but for the sake of the Self. The Self is to be known. Hear about it, reflect upon it, meditate on it. By knowing the

Self, through hearing, reflecting, meditating, one comes to know the Self. There is no existence apart from the Self. As a lump of salt thrown into water cannot be taken out, and wheresoever we taste, the water is salty, so even does the individual self dissolve into the Eternal Consciousness. Individuality arises by the identification of the self, through ignorance, with the elements; and with the disappearance of consciousness of the many, in divine illumination, it disappears. Where there is realisation of the Self, individuality is no more. That is it, my beloved, that I wanted to tell you."

The wife did not understand, so she rejoined: "You say that where there is consciousness of the Supreme Self, individuality is no more. This confuses me."

The sage replied; "Let nothing I have said confuse you. Only meditate well upon the truths that I have spoken. As long as there is duality one sees the other, hears the other, smells the other, thinks of the other, knows the other; but the illumined soul knows that everything is dissolved in the Self. Then, who is there to be thought of and by whom? Who shall be the knower and what the known? The Self is described as 'not this, not this'. It cannot be comprehended. It never attaches Itself, for It is never bound. By whom, then, shall the knower be known? This is the truth of immortality. You will find immortality only in the Supreme Self."[1]

Reality, Time and Space

The great German philosopher Immanuel Kant declared that whatever we perceive, either in the outside world or within ourselves, we know in terms of time, space and

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1. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. IV: 5. Abridged and Adapted from 'The Upanishads'—Translation by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchestor. pp. 141 etc.

causation, the categories of our thought or intellect. Just as when we put on coloured glasses we see everything tinted by the colour, and not as it is, so we can never know the thing-in-itself within ourselves or within the phenomena of the external world. From the Vedantic point of view we say that Kant's intellect led him into a sort of philosophical agnosticism, which holds that there is the Absolute but it can never be experienced as it is.

A thousand years before Kant, in India in the eighth century, there lived a nondualistic mystic and philosopher. Sankaracharya. He too, sooke of *desa, kala,* and *nimitta* — space, time, and causality — through which the Supreme Spirit manifests itself, but which can never reveal the nature of the Absolute, the Reality beyond time, space and causation. But there are many points of difference between these two great thinkers. To Kant, time, space and causation, the categories of the mind, are real. According to Sankara they have only an empirical value. They hold good for all the practical purposes of our phenomenal life, but they have no absolute reality because they are products of Maya, ignorance. So we find that Sankara's Vedanta is more critical than Kant's critical philosophy!

Cosmic Ignorance and Creation ofPlhenomena

Kant held that it is the individual who creates the world of name and form. Sankara declares that the universe of name and form is a cosmic phenomenon which the individual perceives in a certain manner. Each individual understands the world in his own way. An initial mistake is made, owing to our ignorance and then each one of us makes further mistakes about the true nature of cosmic phenomenon. The indivisible Spirit appears to be differentiated as individuals.

Forgetting its real nature, the individual Spirit identifies Itself with the phenomenal world. It fails to recognize the Ultimate Reality lying behind Itself and behind the world.

A story is told of a certain military officer with many decorations who was fond of showing off his medals. A young vistor asked him, "How did you ever win so many medals?" The man replied, "Do you see this big one? First I got that by mistake, and then the others followed as a matter of course." Being drunk with the wine of ignorance we forget ourselves. We make a big mistake, and then make smaller errors one after another.

We are all bound by our limitations, for which ignorance is responsible. So, owing to this drink of cosmic ignorance that has made us mad, the Indivisible Spirit appears to be differentiated into individuals. The individual soul, forgetting its true nature, identifies itself with the various elements, puts on different bodies, perceives and understands things wrongly, and consequently suffers.

Kant and Sankara compared

It is not difficult to acknowledge that there is the thing-in-itself behind every phenomenon in the outside world, and also the thing-in-itself behind our inner life. The question is, are these two aspects of the same thing? And if the reality behind the outer world and the reality behind the inner world are one and the same, is it possible for a human soul to experience the thing-in-itself with a higher faculty than that of the senses or the mind? Agnostic that he was, lost in his own speculation, Kant could give no answer to this.

Sankara, on the other hand, with his direct, intuitive vision of Truth, declared that behind *tat* (that), the objective, cosmic phenomenon, and *tvam* (the subject), there lies the same Absolute which, through our ignorance, appears to be bifurcated into subject and object, microcosm and macrocosm, individual and cosmic universal. In reality, it is the One Spirit that manifests itself as the two. Sankara observes:

> "It cannot even be said that It is one. For how can there be a second other than That? There is neither absoluteness nor non-absoluteness, neither non-entity nor entity, for the Reality is absolutely non-dual. How, then, can I describe That which is the goal of the highest knowledge?"[2]

As we read in the Upanishads, the Atman, Brahman, the Infinite Self can be realized through reflection and meditation which develop the intuitive faculty that reveals the Ultimate Reality beyond time, space and causation, and beyond the sense of the knower, the known and knowledge. The Reality can only be attained by transcending all limitations. The soul cannot know the Self as an object, but it can become one with it. That is our goal. That is what the illumined ones point to when they bid us to follow the path and realize the Truth.

Conceptions of Space and Time

Let us now try to understand something of space and time. In a remarkable passage of the Upanishads we read:

> "All this, whatsoever moves in the Universe, is to be enveloped in the Self."[3]

2. *Nirvana Dasakam.* 10.
3. *Isa Upanishad.* 1.

The nature of the universe is to move, to change. But how do we perceive these changes? A movement exists in time. How do we get our conceptions of space and time?

The ordinary theory is that we become aware that a thing which is near us is moving away, and when that happens we perceive a movement in time and space. Again, when we experience that one thing follows another either in the same or another space, we get our sense of time, our ideas of now, earlier, later, present, past or future. Consider the pendulum of an old-fashioned clock which we see moving in space from one position to another, one movement following the other. The number of periods (clock-time) elapsed serves as a measure of time.

The modern theory of realtivity, which many of us talk about but which few seem to understand, has effected a fundamental change in the scientific conception of space and time. In the words of the great scientist, Minkowski:

> "From henceforth space in itself and time in itself sink into mere shadows, and only a kind of union between the two preserves an independent existence. Every event that happens in the world is determined by the space co-ordinates X, Y, Z, and time co-ordinate T. Thus physical dimension was four-dimentional right from the beginning."

Whatever it is, this measuring of outside events in terms of space and time is possible because of the sense of space and time we have in our minds. The objects we perceive in space have length, breadth, and thickness; change and movement arise in time, rest in time, and disappear in time. But if the sense of time and space exists only in ourselves, something must be done to enable us to rise above this limita-tation if we want to know the Reality.

The Individual and the Universal

Here some subtle questions arise: Is it possible for us to have any conception of space without at least an indefinite idea of something beyond space? Whenever we think of space there is also the idea of infinity, and when we talk of time there is the idea of timelessness. Without these we cannot know anything. The Hindu philosopher asks: How can we have any idea of movement or change? And thus we arrive at the conception of the Absolute, which is infinite, changeless, eternal. Declares the Upanishad:

> "The Self is not born, nor does it die. It has not come into being from anything. This unborn, eternal, everlasting and ancient One suffers no destruction with his seeming destruction of matter."[4]

And the same idea is stressed in the Bhagavad Gita:

> "The eternal, all-pervading, unchanging and immovable Self is the same for ever."[5]

The highest goal of religion is to experience this Ultimate Reality, beyond all relativity, all limitations of time, space and causality, beyond all conceptions of the individual and the universal.

Three kinds of Akasa or Space

As we grow in intelligence we come to have a better and better sense of space. This sense is limited in a child, who finds it hard to cross the street through the moving

4. *Katha Upanishad.* II: 18.
5. VI: 24.

traffic, whereas the more experienced adult, with his wider sense of space which puts each thing in its proper place, has no difficulty in finding his way even through heavy traffic and in judging the correct distance to the other side of the road.

Hindu philosophers speak of various kinds of Akasa or space: There is the physical conception of surrounding space called *Mahakasa*. We know that the physical body and cosmic phenomena, the microcosm and the macrocosm, both exist in space; moon, stars and planets exist in space. As our conception of space grows vaster and vaster, and as we become increasingly introspective, we enter a new conception of mental space, called *Chittakasa*. We begin to realize that our little minds are but parts of an Infinite Mind. Thoughts arise, stay awhile, and go back into the subtle world of which the outer world is but a fragment, covered over with the subtle substance of Chittakasa.

This brings us to the third plane of existence, the subtle plane of spirit called *Chidakasa,* which manifests itself through subtle names and forms. This subtlest plane of spiritual consciousness is something with name and form, but in it the divine light shines. It is the causal plane in which various forms arise, illumined by the light of the spirit. As we read the lives of saints and mystics we find accounts of cosmic visions where they see the whole world lighted by the spirit of God. The sense of space is not yet transcended, for the seer in his vision is still aware of names and forms, although everything is permeated by this wonderful divine radiance. This is the plane from which various forms arise like bubbles in the ocean. On this plane too the Infinite Spirit seems to have bifurcated itself into the soul and the Oversoul. There exist the one

infinite, universal Spirit and many little individual souls. The aim of each person in his spiritual life is to bring about the union of the two.

The Ultimate Reality beyond the Phenomenon

Far beyond this subtle and causal plane is the region of pure Spirit, divested of all limitations, where the individual soul is merged in the universal. The sense of space is transcended, and man realizes a state of pure consciousness wherein lie no seeds of attachment or desire. It is this plane of transcendental consciousness that is described when Yajnavalkya tells his wife:

> "Where there is realization of the Self, individuality is no more."[6]

In Sanskrit we have the word *Sat,* which we translate as the 'Real'. The Real is that which transcends time, that which exists now, and that which will continue to exist throughout the future. That is Sat, and that is Real. Then what is unreal? It is that which appears to be real at first sight but which is proved to be the contrary on final examination. Says Sankara:

> "This is said to be real of which our consciousness never fails, and that to be unreal of which our consciousness fails. A cloth exists, a pot exists, an elephant exists. The consciousness of cloth, etc., is temporary, but not the consciousness of existence."[7]

Our illumined teachers keep reminding us that there is something real, but what we see in our human life, with

6. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.* IV: 5.
7. *The Gita Bhashya.* Commentary on II: 16.

our limited perceptions, is not this reality but only a reflection of it. If we could pierce through this name and form which hide the Reality, we might get a vision of the truth we seek. When the sun sets, the mirage disappears, but the sands on which it was produced remain as they have always been. Likewise, our observing self, too, remains; only the mirage has melted away into nothingness, although for a time it appeared to be so very real.

We perceive the phenomenal world around us; but all at once something happens and we see the Spirit shine through these phenomena, transforming them. until everything around us — all the world of name and form—becomes as unreal as the mirage. We then realize that Spirit alone is the Ultimate Reality. and that the world of sense exists only relatively. For the mystic who rises to the plane of the highest consciousness these phenomena of the outer world do not exist at all. His body-consciousness, mental consciousness, desire and self-interest disappear.

This is the great dictum of non-dualistic Vedanta — that Brahman, the Infinite Spirit, the Absolute is real. But unreality does not signify complete non-existence; it merely appears to be something which it is not. The world of manifold names and forms appears to be real so long as we live in ignorance, but it ceases to exist when we attain to the higher state of spiritual consciousness. That state many may experience but none can describe, for then individuality itself becomes, like a doll of salt, lost in the ocean of Brahman.

The Absolute and Neo-Platonism

One of the greatest of mystics, who exerted a tremendous influence upon Christianity for a thousand years, was

Plotinus, the non-Christian combining the best of Indian and Greek thought. He went to Egypt, in those days the cultural centre for both East and West and, imbibing the spiritual culture, attained eventually to the plane beyond time and space. Out of his own experience he wrote:

> "Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore all is everywhere. Each is then all and all is each. Man as he now is has ceased to be the all, but when he ceases to be an individual he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world."

And thus he echoes the great Upanishadic truth that where there is consciousness of the Self, the individuality is no more. Of God he says:

> "Let us not lie by saying there is anything in Him. Let Him simply be."

Plotinus left us some amazing records of transcendental experiences. In one of his letters he speaks thus of the union between the soul and the Oversoul:

> "We do affirm nothing; we do not give Him any name." "In the reduction of your soul to its simplest self, its divine essence, you realize this union, this identity. I myself have realized it but three times as yet. Porphyry (his disciple) hitherto not once. All that which tends to purity and elevates the mind assists us in this attainment."

Later Porphyry too was blessed with the transcendental experience. His own testimony declares:

> "To Plotinus God appeared, who had neither face nor form, who is above our intelligence. I myself, Porphyry once in my life, at the age of 78, approached this God

and became united with him. This union formed the sum total of Plotinus' desires. He had this union four times while I was with him, and what happened then was ineffable."

"Thou must love God, as not-God, not-Spirit, not-person, not-image, but as He is, a sheer, pure, absolute One, sundered from all two-ness, in whom we must eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness."

This is similar to the "Neti, Neti" (not this, not this) process we find mentioned in the Upanishads. In order to contemplate the Self, we must learn to transcend sense experience.

The Absolute described in Negative terms

Dionysius the Pseudo Areopagite, a Christian follower of Plotinus, describes the Absolute in negative terms:

"It is neither soul nor mind, neither expressed nor conceived, nor greatness nor littleness, nor equality nor inequality, neither standing nor moving nor at rest. Neither is essence, nor eternity, nor time."

In the Mandukya Upanishad we find Hindu mystics of ancient times saying much the same thing:

"Neither is it an indefinite mass of cognition, nor collective cognition, nor non-cognition. It is unseen, unrelated, inconceivable, and indescribable."[8]

And Buddha, after his illumination, also spoke in negative terms:

"There is a state where there is neither water nor air; neither infinity of space nor consciousness nor nothing-

8. *Mandukya Upanishad.* 7.

ness; neither perception nor non-perception. It is without stability, without change; it is the eternal which never originates and never passes away."

"There is a Spirit in the soul, untouchd by time and flesh, flowing from the Spirit, remaining in the Spiritual, itself wholly spritual. . . .It is free of all names and void of all forms. It is one and simple."

Among Christian mystics, perhaps the greatest was Meister Eckhart, who lived in Germany in the thirteenth century. He spoke in similar terms of the Divine Ground beyond all relativity.

"To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the ground of God and the ground of the soul are one and the same."

Realisations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Sri Ramakrishna, the great mystic of modern times, describes vividly his first attainment of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the state of undifferentiated consciousness, with no phenomenal impressions whatsoever, no seeds of attachment, and even no image of God:

"When my Guru first began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta (non-dualistic philosophy with no image of God) he told me to withdraw my mind completely from all objects in the outside world — from body, mind, and ego — and dive into the Atman. I had no difficulty in taking my mind from objects of the world and self, but in spite of all my attempts I could not altogether cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. The radiant figure of the blissful Mother appeared ever

> before me as a living reality, preventing me from passing into the great beyond. 'It is hopeless,' I told my Guru, 'I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state.' The Guru said 'What! You cannot do it? But you have to.' He found a piece of broken glass and stuck it between my eyebrows. 'Concentrate your mind on this point,' he commanded. Then with stern determination I sat again to meditate. As soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it clove her in two. The last barrier fell, and my spirit soared at once beyond the relative plane until I lost myself in Ssamadhi."[9]

Sri Ramakrishna's greatest disciple, Swami Vivekananda, who was called Narendra in his student days, longed to attain the highest goal of Vedanta. One evening it came unexpectedly. When he was meditating, he felt a light at the back of his head, as though a torch had been placed there. It became more and more brilliant until his whole self was merged in the light. He attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi, losing all sense of individuality. What transpired in his consciousness during those moments could never be described. All was quiet in the room where he sat meditating with a brother disciple. Suddenly Narendra cried out: "Where is my body?" While partially descending from the transcendental to a lower plane of consciousness he was aware only of his head; his body seemed to be lost. "It is there! It is there!" cried his brother disciple. But as he observed Narendra's rigid body he became frightened and hastened into the adjoining room to consult the Master. Sri Ramakrishna seemed to know what was happening. So he said, "He has been longing to attain this state. Let him remain

9. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*. p. 189-190.

in it for a while." Later, when Swami Vivekananda, bringing with him the radiance he had found in Samadhi, came to Sri Ramakrishna, he was told: "Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so must this realization you have just experienced be locked up now. You have a great work to do in the world, but when you have finished your appointed task the treasure box will be unlocked and you will know everything then just as you do now."

Later in life, in *The Hymn of Samadhi,* Swami Vivekananda tried to express his experience beyond time and space:

> Lo! The sun is not, nor the comely moon,
> All light extinct; in the great void of space
> Floats shadow-like the image-universe.
> Slowly, slowly, the shadow-multitude
> Entered the primal womb, and flowed ceaseless
> The only current, the 'I am, I am!'
> Lo! 'tis stopped e'en that current flows no more,
> Void merged into void,—beyond speech and mind!
> Whose heart understands, he verily does. [10]

This is how illumined souls enter into the great mystery beyond time and space. When they return, through the grace of God, they bring us the message of the treasure they have found, with a view to helping us to realize the same eternal consciousness, the same eternal bliss.

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10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* Vol. IV. p. 431

CHAPTER XVII

GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Aspects of God's Creation

Two opposing forces are at war with each other. We find this conflict everywhere in the universe, within us and outside us. The two forces are so intermixed that it is impossible to separate them. Light and darkness, purity and impurity, heat and cold, health and illness, pleasure and pain, life and death — in short, what we call good and evil seem to be inseparable. Our difficulty is to reconcile this good and evil — particularly evil — with the existence of a good God. It may be that we need a higher conception of God than we usually have. Let us see what Swami Vivekananda says on this point:

> "The Brahman, the God of the Vedanta, has nothing outside of Himself, nothing at all. All this indeed is He; He is in the universe; He is the universe Himself. He is here. Him we see and feel; in Him we live and move and have our being. You have that conception in the New Testament. It is that idea, God immanent in the universe, the very essence, the heart and soul of things. He manifests Himself, as it were, in this universe. You and I are little bits, little points, little channels, little expressions, all living inside that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. You and I are both outlets of the same channel, and that is God; as such, your nature is God, and so is mine. You are of the nature of God by your birthright, and so am I. You may be an angel of purity, and I may be the blackest of

demons, nevertheless, my birthright is that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. So is yours." "A generalization ending in the Personal God can never be universal for, first of all, to conceive of a Personal God we must say He is all-merciful, all-good. But this world is a mixed thing, some good, some bad. And you will always find that the idea of a Personal God has to carry with it a personal devil. That is how we clearly see that the idea of a Personal God is not a true generalization. We have to go beyond, to the Impersonal. In that, the universe exists, with all its joys and miseries, for whatever exists in it has come from the Impersonal. The storm that kills my friend, I call evil, but that may have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by destroying the bacilli in the air. They call it good, but I call it evil. So both good and evil belong to the elative world, to phenomena. The Impersonal God is not a relative God; therefore it cannot be said that It is either good or bad, but that is something beyond, because it is neither good nor evil. Good, however, is a nearer manifestation of it than evil."[1]

Various conceptions of Good and Evil

Throughout the ages the problem of good and evil has been discussed by philosophers and religious teachers of both the East and the West, and many and varied have been the solutions offered.

Empedocles

Empedocles, born in Sicily 490 B.C., and an eminent doctor, scientist and religious mystic, held that life on earth is formed by the conflict of the two opposite principles of

1. The *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I pp. 373-376.

love and strife, attraction and repulsion. Love is the stuff which impels the elements to intermingle, while strife is the stuff that drags them apart and forces their particles to collect in various proportions. In the opinion of Empedocles, God is the living, moving, thinking, divine world-stuff. He is the world-all, and since they are all parts of Him, the constituents of the universe may also be called divine. Man is a fallen "god" doomed to wander through a long series of incarnations before attaining salvation. The conflict between the opposing forces is part of a natural process.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher of Change, born about 500 B.C., held that good and evil were two notes in a harmony. We human beings see only the opposites, but God sees the harmony. Heraclitus and many of the early philosophers were not bothered by the problem of evil; they merely held that evil was not really evil but a necessary part of the whole. A good life was the life lived in tune with the universal harmony. Goodness consists not only in doing good, but also in becoming good, in living free from evil desires, in living a life of reflection and reason.

The Sophists

In the midst of this conception of harmony, the sophists came to create a moral confusion. They held that "Man is the measure of himself", and so each man could frame his own code of good and evil — a theory which is undoubtedly most dangerous to follow in life.

Socrates

The advent of Socrates, born 470 B.C., at such a time was a blessing. He held a firm belief in the basic principle of right and wrong. "No man is voluntarily bad," he declared. Knowledge was the highest good. When one knows what is good, one will choose to do that. Socrates spent his life in trying to help man to acquire the right knowledge, and discover and follow the path of good.

Plato

Plato, born about 427 B.C., furthered the idea of his master, Socrates. According to him, the world of pure, unchanging ideas is the world of good. The world of sense, the world of change, is evil. One who rules his appetities and will by reason alone lives the good life.

Aristotle

Aristotle, born 384 B.C., held that the good life is one in which man realizes to the fullest the supreme part of his nature — reason. It is a life in which reason rules and the feelings and desires obey. The rational attitude consisted of the "golden mean" between the two extremes, the mean being determined by reason.

Philo

To Philip Judacius, an Alexandrian Jew known as Philo, born in the last quarter of the first century before Christ, God was pefect purity and the source of all good. Matter was the source of all evil. The goal of man is to free his soul, his spiritual part from the body, from matter, the seat of evil, and to return to God and perfect goodness. Philo is said to have greatly influenced Christian thought.

Zoroaster

As noted before, Zoroaster, 1000 B.C., reformed the ancient faith based on the Persian scripture, The Avesta, which speaks of God as Ahura, a sublime character, and also of Ahriman, the evil spirit, and gave it a strictly monotheistic form. He elevated the conception of the Ahura— in whom he concentrated all divine attributes — and conferred upon Him the epithet of Mazda, the wise. So Ahura Mazda came to mean the principal Spiritual Being, the author of the world and the guide of its destiny. He wills the good but is opposed by his antagonist and twin-brother, Ahriman, the evil spirit, the chief of all minor evil forces. The Gathas, embodiying the teachings of Zoroaster, speak of the ultimate triumph of good. Zoroaster hopes that Ahura Mazda will finally break the power of evil and establish the Kingdom of God in heaven and earth. This is also more or less the Christian view.

Christianity

This definite dualism of good and evil is found to be very prominent in Christianity. God had created man good, but he turned to the flesh and became subject to evil and sin. The first man's original sin was transmitted to all men — his descendants. All the forces of evil and sin came to be personified in Satan. Thus in traditional Christianity, two beings seem to be functioning — God , the force of all good, and the Devil, the source of all evil. Christ is believed to have conquered Satan by resisting his temptation. His first advent is said to have delivered believers from Satan's bondage, but his second advent will complete the overthrow of Satan and establish God's kingdom both in heaven and earth.

This is undoubtedly a very good and pious wish. But considering the trend of events can we honestly say that it is likely to be realized? Is the world going to be all-good some day? This seems very doubtful. Belief in Satan was very strong in Western countries during the Middle Ages up to the 17th and 18th centuries, but modern science and thought have so explained away many of the processes of outer nature and also of the inner life of men that many even among church-goers, no longer believe the crude explanations of theologians, who need both a personal God and also a personal Satan in their scheme of creation. Many a thinking man wants a more satisfactory explanation.

Danger of newfangled Monism

Many modern minds do not care for the dualism of God and Satan. They want monotheism and even a kind of Monism. Owing to the onrush of refined materialism in the world of thought, a strange kind of monism has come into being. It believes in the Monism of good, as distinct from the dualism of good and evil in the domain of mind and matter. The old style monotheism recognizes the existence of both good and evil. It tells us how the two forces create a great conflict both in the physical world and even in the heart of man, and it speaks of the ultimate triumph of good at some distant future. But the newfangled monism, which is refined materialism in another form, holds that even on the physical plane it is possible to get rid of evil, of disease, poverty, pain, and unhappiness and to gain perpetual health, prosperity, pleasure and happiness. Has anyone ever realized perpetual sunshine without cloud, or health without disease, or pleasure without pain, or prosperity without adversity on the physical

plane? We should take care that we do not accept a false philosophy of life, accept one order of things, and deny the other, and tend towards a cult of body-worship and pleasure-seeking which is dangerous both to our body and soul. Monocles are sometimes dangerous. Let us learn to see things as they are with our both eyes wide open.

Good and evil—correlatives

What do we find when we look at things with our both eyes wide open? We find that good and evil are correlatives. Logically speaking, we cannot think of the one without the other. The two are mixed up in everything we experience. If we hold that God created good and Satan evil, we must also believe that God and Satan had sat together at the same table in order to create this world in which good and evil are inseparable. Sometimes when we think of the sufferings of the people in our present-day mad world, we think, as Swami Vivekananda reiterates, that if good increases in arithmetical progression, evil increases in geometrical progression. But whatever may be the proportion, Swami Vivekananda tells us clearly:

> "Objective society will always be a mixture of good and evil. Objective life will always be followed by its shadow, death. . . . Our very lives depend upon the death of others — plants or animals or bacilli !. . . . The progress of the world means more enjoyment and misery too. This mixture of life and death, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance is what is called Maya, or universal phenomenon. You may go on for eternity inside this net, seeking for happiness — you find much happiness and much evil too. To have good and no evil is childish nonsense."[2]

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI. p. 341.

We can understand the anxiety of theologians to save God from the contamination of evil, but the way in which they try to do it helps neither God nor man. To say that everything is for the best is a poor consolation. Swami Vivekananda tells us the story of a young man whose father died and left him in poverty with a large family to support. He found his father's friends unwilling to help him. Some of his relations even tried to rob the family of the ancestral home. The young man was in great difficulty. He had a conversation on the matter with a Christian clergyman who consoled him by saying: "Oh, all these troubles are sent for our good. There's no misery, but only good, in what has happened to you." Then, six months later, a son was born to the clergyman, and to celebrate this event he gave a thanksgiving party to which the young man was also invited. The clergyman prayed and thanked God for his mercies. The young man stood up "Stop!" he cried, "This is all misery!" "But why?" asked the astonished clergyman. And the young man replied, "Because when my father died you said it was good, though apparently evil; even so, now this birth of your son, though apparently good, is really evil!"

The attempt to cure the misery of the world by putting a piece of gold leaf on an old sore is no good. We must go to the root of our troubles and look at both good and evil from a new point of view.

The Vedantic view of good and evil

Here we come to the Vedantic theory of Maya. According to the Monistic Vedanta, God, or the Supreme Being, is unaffected by evil and stands above relative good which

is the correlative of evil. Both relative good and relative evil have a common origin. They are two-fold manifestations of the same cosmic power, universal energy on the plane of phenomena. This is also the scientific view. As Herbert Spencer says:

> "We are obliged to regard every phenomenon as a manifestation of some power by which we are acted upon."[3]

To say it is all the will or sport of God is no explanation. Of course, Maya, too, is not an explanation. It is a statement of fact. Maya does not imply illusion, it means the world of relativity with all its opposites and contradictions.

The Persians, Christians and other dualists believing in the dualism of good and evil tried to split the cosmic power into two. Vedanta takes it whole, but recognizes its twofold manifestation.

Teachers of Vedanta tell us that Maya is like a cloud. It hides the truth and creates a wonderful phenomenon with light and shade. The beautiful sunset in the Himalayas very often reminds us of Maya. This mysterious power is called creative ignorance, and here we quote the words of Swami Vivekananda:

> "There is but One — the Free — the Knower — Self
> Without a name, without a form or stain.
> In Him is Maya dreaming all this dream.
> The Witness, He appears as Nature, Soul."[4]

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3. *First Principles*, p. 73.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV. pp. 373-6.

"Vidya Maya" and "Avidya Maya"

Maya has her two opposites, Vidya Maya and Avidya Maya. Sri Ramakrishna says:

> "Brahman is beyond Vidya and Avidya, knowledge and ignorance. It is beyond Maya, the illusion of duality. The world consists of the illusory duality of knowledge and ignorance. It contains knowledge and devotion, and also attachment to 'sex and gold'; righteousness and unrighteousness; good and evil. But Brahman is unattached to these. Good and evil apply to the Jiva, the individual soul, as do righteousness and unrighteousness; but Brahman is not at all affected by them. . . .
>
> "You may ask, 'How, then, can one explain misery and sin and unhappiness?' The answer is that these apply only to the Jiva. Brahman is unaffected by them. There is poison in a snake; but though others may die bitten by it, the snake itself is not affected by the poison."[5]

Spiritual life

Spiritual life is a continual warfare between the opposite forces, between the higher and the lower nature of man. Both the divine and the animal tendencies are so often found mysteriously blended in the same individual. The aspirant must follow the path of purification, his constant effort being to eliminate the evil and strengthen the good in himself.

As purity is cultivated, as we rise above evil to the domain of good, we feel our body become light, our senses become quiet and steady, our intellect become luminous; our entire being shines with a strange luminosity. One step more and we reach the terrace of spiritual consciousness. It is there

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5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 28.

that our soul becomes unified with the Light Supreme which shines in and through all. It is the being lifted above the clouds.

We must be bold and recognize the Divine Principle in creation, preservation and destruction; in beauty and ugliness; pain and pleasure; honour and dishonour; youth and old age and in life and death alike. As we realize the unchanging Spirit in the midst of the changing names of forms and remain unaffected by them, we remain above the relative good and relative evil.

The enlightened soul

The enlightened soul is very different from us all, and he is to be judged not by our standard but his own. Being established in the glory of the Spirit, he has transcended all moral conflicts which tear us asunder so often. Having eliminated evil through strenuous moral and spiritual practices, he entertains only good desires and can do good without producing evil. He does good to others out of his unbounded love for all.

> "He sees the Self in his own body, he sees all as the Self. Evil does not overtake him; but he transcends all evil. Evil does not trouble him; he consumes all evil."[6]

So let us follow in his footsteps; let us follow the path of good in all circumstances, always remembering that good is nearer the ultimate Truth than evil.

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6. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.* IV : iv : 23.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOD IN EVERYTHING

God has become everything

The world by no means exists apart from God, and it is the goal of all spiritual aspirants to realise this truth for themselves. The illumined soul knows that it is God alone that has become everything. Let us see what Sri Ramakrishna says on the subject of attaining this state of consciousness:

> "A man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the Relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realising the Absolute he should climb down to the Relative, and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion."[1]

> "God has different forms, and He sports as Isvara, Deva, man and the universe. In every age He descends to earth in human form, as an Incarnation, to teach people love and devotion."[2]

> "A devotee of God accepts everything. He accepts the universe and its created beings, as well as the indivisible Satchidananda."[3]

> "All doubts disappear when one sees God. It is one thing to hear of God, but quite a different thing to see Him. A man cannot have one hundred per cent convic-

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. p. 196.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.* p. 345.

tion through mere hearing. But if he beholds God face to face, then he is wholly convinced."[4]

"The partial knower limits God to one object only. He thinks that God cannot exist in anything beyond that."[5]

"Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the Deity in the Kali temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door-frame — all Pure Spirit. Men, animals, and other beings — all Pure Spirit. Then like a mad man I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped."[6]

"One day, while worshipping Siva, I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virat universe itself is Siva. After that my worship of Siva through the image came to an end. Another day I had been plucking flowers, when it was revealed to me that the flowering plants were like so many bouquets. It was revealed to me in a flash. I did not calculate about it. It was shown to me that each plant was a bouquet adorning the Universal Form of God. I look on man in just the same way. When I see a man, I see that it is God Himself who walks on earth."[7]

God and Evil

It would be very natural for a sceptical mind, on reading the above quotations, to ask how it is possible for God to be in everything. Most people will accept the idea that God is in the good, but are unwilling to admit that He is also in the evil. For example, if some one hurts and slanders us we find it at first almost impossible to see God in that person.

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4. *Ibid.* p. 346.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*

To us he is the incarnation of evil. But on reflection we may find that the slanderer has done us a service, he may have made us more introspective than before and revealed faults in us which we have hitherto been unaware of, with the result that we begin to make some attempt to improve our character. And thus, as we think more deeply, it becomes apparent that God dwells in all, and that it is possible for some good to come out of evil.

To illustrate this point — that evil is frequently a blessing in disguise — here is an anecdote about Ibrahim Ibin Adham, the great Sufi mystic of the eighth century:

> "Once a great crowd gathered to honour the blessed Saint of Allah. That was what they called him. Seeing the crowd, Ibrahim was greatly embarrassed. He said to the crowd; 'My good people, why make so much fuss about that unworthy man? I know him well. He is both a sinner and an infidel.' The people, not knowing who he was, rose in a fury, saying: 'You call such a great man a sinner? Then you yourself are the sinner!' And someone took him by the throat, while another gave him a sound beating. Insulted and injured, the saint remained calm. He said to himself, 'Oh my mind, you have received your just reward.' And he thanked God for giving him his due. Later, when the people became aware of his identity, they came to him begging for forgiveness."

Was dishonour all evil?

And there is the example of Sri Ramakrishna's great disciple, Durgacharan Nag, who used to suffer agonizing pain owing to colic and other troubles; when the pain became most excruciating he would say, "Hail Ramakrishna!

Glory to Thee! Blessed indeed is misery since it reminds me of God!" Was pain all evil here?

The attitude of the illumined is very different from ours with regard to good and evil. To them, evil is that which makes the soul selfish — makes the soul turn away from the Ultimate Truth, whereas good, on the other hand, is that which helps one to rise above selfishness and to move towards the Supreme Reality.

One Power with two-fold manifestations

In order to accept, even intellectually, the idea that God is in everything, from the sublime to the most terrible, one must regard all phenomena as the manifestation of the same power. As noted before, this view is both scientific and philosophical. Hindu philosophers call this power Prakriti or Maya. They sometimes refer to it as the great cause of all contradictions. The Maya that produces and brings into being the phenomenal world or existence of contradictions has two aspects. One leads the soul towards God, while the other takes it away.

How did the ancient teachers arrive at this Truth? First, they tried speculation; they attempted to formulate several systems but were not pleased. Finally, they dived into the very depths of their being, into the very nature of things, through meditation. They became absorbed, and entered into the super-conscious state. When they came out of that, they had discovered that it is the one Divine Power that brings this entire world into being, and that this power has two aspects, one binds, and the other frees the soul. As Sri Ramakrishna tells us, what we call *Vidya*, the freeing power, manifests itself as discrimination, non-attachment, devotion, and love for God; and *Avidya*, the

binding power, expresses itself as passion, ambition, desire for wealth and honour. All these we find within ourselves, and still we believe that God dwells in the hearts of us all. Both aspects are, as it were, parts of the same staircase, leading both to the terrace and the cellar. Both are parts of the same building and made of the same stuff — bricks and mortar.

What matter most in our spiritual life are our reactions, but not the objective manifestations as such. The tender and the terrible, the beautiful and the ugly, sunshine and darkness, heat and cold, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all of these make up the Cosmos, but if they can produce in us love for Truth, they are, each one of them, blessings in disguise.

Divine Light hidden in everything

Illumined souls tell us that they see the same Divine Light shining in and through everybody, the good as well as the bad. The good are coming to discover this inner Light. The bad are still unaware of it, but some day they too will realise what is in their heart of hearts. This is their birthright. Says the seer of the Upanishads:

> "This Self is hidden in all beings. It does not reveal Itself to all, but It can be seen and is seen only by the subtle seers, who have made their minds refined, one-pointed and pure."[8]

This purity can only be obtained through spiritual disciplines.

The Life of Sri Ramakrishna narrates how Narendra, who at first rejected the very idea of Advaita and made

8. *The Katha Upanishad*, III: 12.

fun of the Master about it, was totally transformed by a touch of the Master. When Sri Ramakrishna tried to drive home to his young disciple that everything is pervaded by the Supreme Spirit, Narendra was even laughing over it with a half-religious, half-worldly man who lived in the same temple as the Master, with the words: "How can that be? This jug is God, this cup is God, whatever we see is God, and we too are God! Nothing can be more preposterous!" Sri Ramakrishna, who was in his room, heard Narendra's laughtèr and came out in a state of semi-consciousness with his cloth under his arm like a child: "Hallo? What are you talking about?" he said smiling, touched Narendra and plunged into Samadhi. Narendra described the effect of the touch:

> "That magic touch of the Master immediately brought a change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! . . . I returned home, but there, too, everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found everything — the food, the plate, the person who served and even myself — was nothing but That."[9]

This state continued for some days and, when the Swami regained the normal plane, he realized that he had had a glimpse of that state of consciousness in which one sees the one spiritual Being permeating everything. In later years, after deeper experiences and understanding, Swami Vivekananda declared:

> "There is evil, and there is good, but the apex, the centre, is the Reality. He is neither evil nor good. He is the best. The best can only be one, the good can be many,

9. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 343.

the evil many. There will be degrees of variation between good and evil, but the best is only one."[10]

He had realized the One Transcendental Spirit who manifests Himself as everything and yet remains untouched.

Supersensuous experiences

Now at this point we have to understand the relation between the microcosm and the macrocosm — the individual and the universal. We have our body; our little body is part of the cosmic body — is part of the infinite ocean of matter. Our subtle body, or mental body is again part of the cosmic mind. If we could go deeper we would find that the soul, our soul, or individual consciousness, is part of the cosmic consciousness which encompasses us all. We are all drowned in it. This is no imagination; it is an experience. So we have this physical plane, and also the mental and spiritual planes. Supersensuous experiences take place on all the three planes.

In order to find out the structure of Benzene, Kekule, the German chemist, meditated on it for days and nights together, and eventually he had a dream. He saw a number of snakes, and one of them seized its own tail. The image whirled before his eyes; as though from a flash of lightning he awoke. He occupied the rest of the night working out the consequences of this hypothesis. He had discovered the structure of Benzene. It is a hexagonal ring. At each corner he found one atom of hydrogen and one of carbon. This was a supersensuous experience, but relating to something physical. Then there are experiences on the mental

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10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II. p. 418.

plane which lead to psychic powers, and experiences on the spiritual plane leading to illumination.

Spiritual experiences—personal and impersonal

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the three bodies of man and also of the Ultimate Reality beyond them all: the body consisting of the gross elements is the physical body; the body made up of the mind, the ego, and so on, is the subtle body; and the body by means of which one enjoys the Bliss of God and holds communion with Him is the causal body. On the physical plane, with our physical eyes, we see only physical things. On the mental plane, with out mental eye, we see subtler things. On the spiritual plane, with our spiritual eye, with our spiritual vision, we come in touch with the divine forms, with the Divine Reality. We can see divine forms. We may as well realize the formless. Now, corresponding to what we call the individual causal body, there is the universal causal body. Our teachers call it Isvara. This is the personal aspect of the all-pervading Divine Reality. The transcendental Spirit first manifests Itself on the subtlest plane of consciousness out of which arise different spiritual forms. On this plane we still have the individual as the soul and the Cosmic as the Oversoul. Wonderful is the Divine Play that takes place between the soul and the Oversoul. This the mystics alone realize.

Mystical realizations with and without form

Now, when the mystic sees a divine, holy form — it may be of a Christ, a Buddha or a Krishna—, he is seeing

something very personal. Again, perhaps the same mystic beholds a grander phenomenon when the personal has merged in the impersonal. He sees the Divine Spirit shining in and through everything. From the plane of form the devotee goes to the plane of the formless.

Sometimes a conflict arises in the mind — how can God be both with form and without form? From his deeper experience Sri Ramakrishna tells us:

> "Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the Bhakta's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a person. But with the rising of the sun of knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a person, nor does one see God's forms."[11]

There is no contradiction between the form and the formless. When it is cold, forms appear as ice and when the sun rises again, the form becomes formless. So also is the case of the devotee. When his heart is filled with devotion he wishes to see divine forms; and sometimes he wants to be in communion with the formless, or it may be that the Infinite Spirit reveals Itself as such. Mystics possess the spiritual eye and understanding which are unfolded through spiritual disciplines.

Illustrations from Christian mystics

Think of St. Theresa seeing the holy form of the resurrected Christ. The form was of unspeakable beauty

11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 78.

and majesty. But sometimes she did not see any form at all — she felt the presence of the invisible Christ and this feeling was transforming. Did she have any vision of the Cosmic? One day, we are told, she was able to perceive in one instant how all things are seen and are contained in God. This left a tremendous impression on her mind, but she could not accurately describe her experience, and in any case had she written about it she would probably have been branded as a heretic. It is criminal for a Christian mystic to say he saw everything as a manifestation of God.

St. Francis of Assisi is classed as the chief of the nature mystics of the Western world. He had visions of God, but more than anyone else he saw something divine in nature. His love for God, man, animals and birds was unbounded. The elements were his brothers and sisters. He even recognised a sister in death "from whom no man living can escape." All creatures, to him, reflected a divine radiance and this filled the saint's heart with joy.

Experiences of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna had many visions of God in His various aspects — God as mother, father, friend, beloved, as the Soul of all souls. He realized the Universal Spirit and felt he was part of That. And there came a time when he also realized the Transcendent Being. Step by step, from the form to the formless, he went higher and higher and was lost in the experience of the Transcendental Reality beyond all relativity. By following the process of "not this, not this" he reached the transcendental experience which Sankara described in such glowing terms:

"Only Bliss, Bliss—without direction, relation, name or form. The disembodied Soul lost in Its unspeakable

Bliss beyond all relativity, waking, dream and deep sleep."[12]

Most mystics, as Sri Ramakrishna tells us, do not care to come down from this blissful state, but he came down, brought down by the Divine Will. He came down to share his unique spiritual experiences with his disciples and his fellow-beings. And not only that but, as we know, he made the foremost of his disciples, Swami Vivekananda, realize for himself the experience of the Transcendental and also helped him to come down to the plane of Divine Immanence where he saw everything shining with Divine Glory. Speaking to the Master about this wonderful experience, Swami Vivekananda said:

> "I was happy in the superconscious state. In my infinite joy I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to enable me to remain in that state."
>
> "For shame!" cried the Master. "How can you ask for such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life and here you wish to stay absorbed in your personal joy like an ordinary man! This realization will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings, you will do great things in the world; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor."[13]

Seeing God in Man

Sitting at the feet of their illumined Master, Swami Vivekananda and his brother-disciples learned the two-fold

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12. *Vivekachudamani*, v. 408.

13. Letter of Swami Shivananda, dated 7th Dec. 1927. Quoted by Romain Rolland in *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 280-1.

ideal which they graciously passed on to us — the ideal of renunciation and service, the ideal of work and worship, the ideal of meditation on the Godhead and along with this, the ideal of service to the God-in-man. They all realized that humanity is one and that it is God-embodied.

One day the Master was speaking to the disciples on the teachings of the great prophet of Divine Love, Sri Chaitanya, the central theme of which is:

> "Have relish for the name of God, have compassion for all living creatures, and do service to the devotees of the Lord."

Discussing this, the Master fell into the superconscious state and, as he emerged from it, the disciples heard him saying to himself:

> "Compassion to creatures! Compassion to creatures! To show compassion to creatures—no, that is not right. It is not compassion but it is service to men, recognizing them to be veritable manifestations of God."

Swami Vivekananda received a new light through this, and he observed:

> "The ideal of Vedanta lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practised as well in the home and can be applied to all our daily schemes of life. Let everyone understand that it is God alone who has manifested Himself as the world, and as all created beings and things. Do service to man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God. This will purify your heart and you will realize in due course that you, too, are part and parcel of the Divine Being."[14]

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14. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 107.

And we hear the Swami saying:

> "From highest Brahman to yonder worm,
> And to the very minutest atom,
> Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
> Friend, offer mind, soul, body at their feet.
> These are His manifold forms before thee,
> Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
> Who loves all beings without distinction,
> He indeed is worshipping best his God."[15]

Seeing God in everything

The man of Self-realization sees God in everything. As Sri Ramakrishna says:

> "One clearly realizes that God Himself has become the universe and beings."[16]

We, spiritual seekers, must have the spiritual eye to see this for ourselves. The Master says again:

> "You will develop that eye as soon as your mind becomes pure."[17]

In our distracted, divided, modern world, we need something of this Cosmic Vision that humanity is one and God-embodied. It is necessary for us all to feel this living presence of the Supreme Spirit, to realize the Divine Immanence in all our being, in all our senses, in all our limbs and in our mind and heart.

How? Hear about it. Reflect on it. Meditate on it. Our spiritual teachers tell us, along with that, to do service to our fellow beings. Meditation, worship, prayer,

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15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, p. 429.
16. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 369.
17. *Ibid.*

as well as spiritualized service, enable us to reach our goal sooner. They help us to unfold the spiritual eye that enables the soul to have visions; sincere meditation and loving service together purify the mind speedily, so let us always remember the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

> "The pure mind acquires a new attitude. Through that mind one sees God in this world. Therefore one needs spiritual discipline."[18]

18. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIX

HOW ILLUMINED SOULS LIVE IN THE WORLD

Intellectual Knowledge and Spiritual Illumination

Illumined souls are those whose consciousness has been lighted up by the self-effulgent light of Truth, the Supreme Divine Reality, called variously God, Brahman, Jehovah, Allah. We must, however, clearly distinguish between mere theoretical knowledge and the knowledge which follows actual experience. Book-learning is often mistaken for the highest knowledge, but intellectual knowledge about the ultimate Reality is totally different from Its direct realization. There is a world of difference between the man of realization and the mere intellectual. While the former is one who is "free from imperfections and doubts, with senses controlled, and engaged in the good of all beings,"[1] the latter may, as Sri Ramakrishna points out, be no better than the vulture which soars high in the sky but has its gaze only on the charnel-pit below; intellectually he may be dabbling in the highest truths, but his heart may always be set on petty selfish gains.

Hindu teachers always draw a distinction between the two kinds of knowledge — the Para Vidya and the Apara Vidya, the higher and the lower. The lower is the theoretical knowledge of the scriptures and related subjects like

1. *The Bhagavad Gita*, V: 25.

phonetics, prosody, grammar, etc. The higher is that knowledge by which the Supreme Spirit is known or realized.

There is a great risk of being lost in this lower knowledge which certainly holds an unending attraction for our superficially inquisitive minds. We would do well to realize its severe limitations. This truth is pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna in a homely parable:

> "A pandit was once crossing the Ganga in a boat. Fond of displaying his erudition, he was asking a fellow-passenger, 'Do you know Vedanta?' And the reply was 'No, revered sir.' 'The Samkhya and the Yoga?' But the fellow-passenger was ignorant of all philosophies. Suddenly, while they were talking, a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink when the passenger turned to the pandit and asked him, 'Sir, can you swim?' 'No,' replied the pandit. 'I don't know the Vedanta, Samkhya or Yoga,' said the passenger, 'but I know how to swim.' "[2]

If one does not know how to cross the waters of Maya or Samsara, no amount of scriptural cerudition will be of any avail.

When M, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* met the Master, quite soon after their acquaintance, Sri Ramakrishna inquired about M's wife: "Tell me, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of Avidya?" M replied, "She is all right, but I'm afraid she is ignorant." M was a highly educated man, the headmaster of a high school, and so described his wife as ignorant. But sharply came the Master's admonition, "Are you a man of knowledge, then?" M's ego was badly shocked, but later he learnt that to

2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 341.

know God is knowledge, and not to know Him is ignorance.[3]

The Chandogya Upanishad relates an episode which drives home the same truth. Narada, who later became one of the greatest illumined saints of all times, approached the saint Sanatkumara as a student and asked for instruction. The teacher inquired: "What have you already studied?" Narada replied that he had mastered all the branches of learning — art, science, music, philosophy and the sacred scriptures. "But," said he, "I have gained no peace. I have studied all this, but I have not known the Self. I have heard that he who knows the Self overcomes grief. Grief is ever my lot. Help me, I pray you, to overcome it." And the essence of the teacher's instruction in reply was: "The Infinite alone is Bliss. There is no bliss in the finite. Realize the Infinite." Narada did realize the Infinite and thus became illumined. His heart was filled with love for all distressed beings. He became a teacher of the highest knowledge and devotion, and helped many to rise above all grief by realizing Divine Bliss.[4]

Thus, it is the knowers of Truth that are the "Illumined Souls." Even as Christ has said: "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free."

The active and quiet types of illumined souls

Among the illumined souls, there is the active type and also the quiet type. About them, Sri Ramakrishna says:

> "There are two classes of Paramahamsas. Those belonging to the first care for their own good alone; they feel satis-

3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. *The Chandogya Upanishad*, VII.

fied if they themselves attain the goal. But there are others who, even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, remain on this plane so that they may describe to others the various spiritual disciplines by which they have realized God. These perfected souls teach spiritual truths to others, and they do so only to help them in spiritual life. . . . Some eat mangoes secretly and remove all trace of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. There are sages, who, even after attaining knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the Bliss of God in the company of devotees."[5]

He also relates the parable of the four friends who once saw a place enclosed by a wall. The wall was very high and they were all eager to know what was on the other side. One of them climbed to the top of the wall. What he saw on looking inside made him speechless with wonder. He only cried "Ah! Ah!" and jumped in. The others, too, did the same. Now who could tell what was inside?

Fortunately all illumined souls are not like that. Some can and do come back to tell us of the mysteries beyond, and help us also to experience them. They are our greatest teachers. But, in our gratitude and admiration for them, we must not fail to appreciate also the greatness of the quiet or contemplative type of enlightened souls. Let us not be thoughtless enough to call the latter selfish. By living and realizing the spiritual ideal, they make it a blessing for us. Their powerful spiritual thoughts purify the mental atmosphere and fertilize the soil necessary for the growth of spiritual men and women. Their active spiritual vibrations ever support us in our spiritual endeavours and struggles.

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5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 650.

The power of silent spiritual thought and realization is too great to be underestimated.

In all religions we find both the active or practical type and the silent or contemplative type of mystics. There were many ascetics in the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, the desert-fathers and pillar-saints in Christianity, and in Islam the Sufi saints who withdrew from social life and dedicated themselves exclusively to a life of contemplation. They are like some of the wonderful desert flowers which, without being seen by any human eye, disappear completely but leave their lovely fragrance in the air.

Lao Tze and Confucius

Thus, among the great sages of China, we have Lao Tze, the quiet mystic, and Confucius, the active humanist, who was deeply interested in social stability. While very little is known of Lao Tze, there are many biographical works about Confucius. Lao Tze's greatest interest was the realization of the transcendent and immanent Spirit, the Tao:

> "There is a Being wondrous and complete,
> Before heaven and earth, It was;
> How calm It is! How spiritual!
> Even if one has but a little knowledge,
> One can walk in the way of the Great Supreme."[6]

What Lao Tze taught was this:

> Get into harmony with the Tao—the Great Spirit in this—and you will be unconsciously impelled to right action.

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6. Quoted by R.E. Hume in *The Treasure House of the Living Religions*, p. 6.

He presents the ideal of illumination and the illumined man when he says:

> "Banish (mere worldly) wisdom, discard (mere theoretical) knowledge,
> Reveal thy Simple Self,
> Embrace thy Original Nature,
> Check thy selfishness,
> Curtail thy desires."[7]

> "The wise one does not know many things,
> He who knows many things is not wise.
> The sage does not accumulate (for himself),
> He lives for other people,
> And grows richer himself;
> He gives to other people,
> And has greater abundance.
> The Tao of Heaven
> Blesses, but does not harm.
> The way of the Sage
> Accomplishes, but does not contend."[8]

The wise one, too, blesses like the Tao, for he is a channel through which the Tao acts.

Confucius, too became illumined in his own way. He held that:

> "To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the universal order, that indeed is the highest human achievement."[9]

And at the age of seventy he declared:

> "At fifteen I began to be seriously interested in study. At thirty I had formed my character. At fifty I knew

7. *The Wisdom of China and India*—Lin Yutang, p. 592.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 624.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 831.

the will of heaven. At sixty nothing that I heard disturbed me. At seventy I could let my thoughts wander without trespassing the moral law."[10]

The stability of the Chinese society is greatly due to the teachings of Confucius. But Lao Tze, too, left his great contribution to Chinese and world spiritual culture. Only one like him, devoted to quietude, contemplation and illumination could write the book of Tao.

For the all-round welfare of the world we need both the Lao Tze and Confucius types.

Just as in the case of Taoism and Confucianism, all the world religions have the ideal of the perfect man, and perfection.

The Buddha and the ideal of perfection in Buddhism

Buddhism declares that:

> "He who has removed from himself all sinfulness, who is free from impurity, who is self-restrained, who is an accomplished master of knowledge, who has fulfilled the duties of holiness — such may justly call himself a *first-class person*. Who is deep in wisdom and intelligence who with skill can discern the right and wrong, who has attained the highest goal — him I deem a *first-class person*.

Buddha himself never spoke of God. To him, Truth was the transcendental reality — beyond the one and the many; beyond God, the Creator, the souls and the universe. This realization gave him a superhuman stability, transforming him from Gautama into the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 814.

Kisa Gotami had but one son, and he died. Drowned in grief, she took the dead child to all her neighbours asking them for medicine to cure the child. They naturally concluded that she was out of her mind. Someone, however, directed her to the Buddha. She went and begged him: "Master, give me the medicine that will cure my child." He answered: "Bring a handful of mustard-seeds; but it must be from a house where none has lost a child, husband, parent or friend." Gotami went from door to door for the mustard-seed. Pitying her, people readily offered her the mustard-seed, but not a house was there where some dear one had not been carried away by death. At the end of this futile quest, knowledge dawned upon her. She realised that death was common to all and that she had been too selfish in her grief. Seeking the path that leads one to immortality out of the valley of death and desolation, she put away her selfish attachment to the child, returned to the Buddha and took refuge in him.

It was in this gentle fashion that the Buddha brought home to her the inevitability of death. His compassion was so great that he would not be harsh even in preaching what is universal truth. His heart was so full with love and sympathy for suffering creatures that he declared on another occasion:

> "May all the evils and sufferings of the world come to me. May the world be saved."

Christ and the Christian ideal

Christianity declares that the perfect man is poor in spirit, meek, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is merciful, pure in heart, and perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect. Christ taught:

"I am in my Father, ye in me, and I in you. I and my Father are one. Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha—all of them devotees of Christ — was sick, and the sisters sent word to Christ. Christ knowing that "the sickness was not unto death," but "for the glory of the Lord, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby," went to them. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awaken him out of his sleep." By that time, Lazarus was 'dead' and was put into the grave. The sisters met Christ and in great grief said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." When Jesus saw Mary weeping as also the Jews who were with her, he also wept. Then he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus, as the story says, came forth from the grave.

We see here the tremendous sympathy of Jesus, as also his consciousness of the power within Him born of divine perfection.

Mohammed and the Islamic ideal

According to Islam, piety does not consist merely in turning one's face towards the east or west. He is pious who believes in God; who, for the love of God, disburses his wealth to kindred and to orphans and the needy; who observes prayer; who is patient under ills and hardships and in times of trouble; and who fears the Lord.

Mohammed had an abiding faith in God. A Bedouin one day found him alone and was about to attack him. "Who is going to save you?" he asked. Mohammed replied, "God." The sword dropped, Mohammed seized it and brandishing it, asked in turn, "Who is going to save you?"

Came the desperate answer, "None, O Mohammed." At that Mohammed declared: "Then learn from me of Divine Mercy." Henceforward the Bedouin became a devout follower of Mohammed.

At another time, Mohammed and a follower were in hiding. The enemies came near them. The follower said: "We two are alone." Mohammed replied "Why, we are not two, we are three!" On another occasion he declared:

> "There is no private discourse among three persons but He (meaning God) is the fourth of them. He is with them wheresoever they be."

It is this living faith in God that impressed many and brought them within his fold.

The Vedantic ideal

Vedanta presents the highest type of the illumined soul. The Mundaka Upanishad declares:

> "Verily, he becomes Brahman who realises Brahman. He overcomes evil and transcends grief. Being free from all knots of the heart, he attains to immortality."[11]

Reaching the highest state of superconsciousness, he finds that the phenomena had totally disappeared from him. By this experience, his entire attitude to and outlook on life are transformed. Even when he comes down to the plane of the external world, the transcendental experience remains. He is but the witness of all phenomena. Of such a one, the Bhagavad Gita says:

> "When a man has cast away all the desires of his heart and feels satisfied in the Self alone, then he is said to be

11. III: ii: 9.

one of steady wisdom. Having realised in the transcendental state the Self dwelling equally in all, he hates none and is friendly and compassionate towards all. He is free from the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'. Even-minded in pain and pleasure, forbearing, ever contented, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm convictions, he has his mind and intellect fixed on the Divine."[12]

No more need he strive to assert the reality of the Self; he has become totally established in it. He has also gone beyond all moral conflicts inevitable for the struggling aspirant. As Sri Ramakrishna says, "Like an expert dancer, he can never take a false step," though he does not, or need not, struggle to follow set rules laboriously like the beginner. Having attained self-realisation, he has gone beyond relative good and evil. As Professor Max Muller correctly observes:

> "This never was intended as freedom in the sense of licence, but as freedom that can neither lapse into sinful acts, nor claim any merit for good acts, being at rest and blessed in itself and Brahman."[13]

With the attainment of the *Summum bonum* of life, all selfish interest has ceased for him. If such illumined souls live, it is only to bring light to others and to promote their welfare; their life is but the fulfilment of some cosmic purpose.

Among the Hindus one finds a variety of the supremely illumined souls, from the most ancient times down to modern days. Alexander, in the midst of his ruthless military campaigns in India, heard of a great Hindu sage. Drunk with his victories, he sent a messenger to the sage with the ulti-

12. *The Bhagavad Gita*, II:55 and XII: 13-14.
13. *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 180.

matum that if the sage would go to Alexander, he would be rewarded with splendid gifts; if not, his head would be cut off. But the sage only smiled at this grim message and replied: "All the gifts and promises of Alexander are to me utterly useless. Should he cut off my head he cannot destroy my soul. The soul will go to its Master, leaving the body like a worn-out garment. Let him terrify those who wish for gold and wealth and who fear death. I have no need of any of Alexander's things and will not go to him. But if he wants anything from me, let him come here!"

Strong with the strength of illumination, he was more than a match for the conqueror.

Sankara and Ramanuja

In his *Viveka Chudamani* or *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, Sankaracharya describes the man of illumination in these words:

> "Great souls, calm and magnanimous, do good to others, as does the spring. Having themselves crossed the dreadful ocean of death, they help others to cross the same, without any selfish motive. It is the nature of the magnanimous to move of their own accord toward removing the troubles of others."[14]

Sankara himself was such a one. Having attained the highest spiritual illumination he engaged himself in the active service of humanity, going about the length and breadth of the vast Indian sub-continent even in those days of the 9th century when travel conditions were so difficult, Spreading the Truth among the people, giving a higher turn

14. 37-38.

to their spiritual ideals, composing a number of philosophical works of the highest wisdom and hymns of deepest devotion, he held before the people the ideal of true spirituality.

Ramanuja emphasized the path of devotion and service to the Lord in a spirit of self-surrender as the best means to salvation. Spiritual experience brought to his heart an unbounded compassion. While initiating him into the Holy Name of the Lord, which would destroy all one's sins, Ramanuja's Guru strictly forbade him to disclose it to anyone else. If he disobeyed, he would go to hell. But Ramanuja's compassion made him feel that if the Holy Name could save those who repeated it, then he would give it to as many as possible and would enable them to save themselves by it. If this meant transgressing the Guru's instructions and going to hell, he would gladly do so. So, he climbed to the top of the temple tower, and joyously summoning one and all to him, revealed to the crowd the Holy Mantra given by his Guru.

Pavahari Baba—the silent contemplative

Pavahari Baba (19th century) was of the silent, contemplative type. Swami Vivekananda spoke of him as "a man of wonderful humility and self-realization." One day a thief had broken into his Ashrama; but when he saw the saint, he became frightened and fled, leaving the things he had collected in a bundle behind. The saint, however, picked it up and ran after the thief. Afraid of being caught, the thief ran faster and faster, but ultimately the Baba caught up with him. Imagine his surprise when the saint laid the bundle at his feet, and with folded hands and tearful eyes told him: "O Narayana, forgive me for intruding! Pray accept these things which belong to you and not to me." His spiritual

realization made him actually see the Lord in all beings, even in the thief, whose life was completely transformed by this strange but holy contact.

When Vivekananda asked him why he did not come out of his seclusion in his cave to help the world, he replied: "Do you think that physical help is the only help possible? Is it not possible that one mind can help other minds, even without the activity of the body?" At another time in reply to a question as to why he, a perfected Yogi, was performing some rituals and worship meant only for beginners, he said, "Why do you take it for granted that everybody performs Karma for his own good? Cannot one perform Karma for others?"

Sri Ramakrishna

In Sri Ramakrishna, we find a wonderful example of the attainment and manifestation of the highest spiritual consciousness in a variety of aspects. Whether indrawn or conscious of the external world, he would see the same Divine Spirit in all beings. Even in a fallen woman he saw the same Divine Mother.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali playwright and actor, was one of those whose life was totally transformed on coming into contact with the Master. He was an out and out Bohemian given to many vices; but through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna he was lifted up from the depths of his moral degradation to the rare heights of devotion and complete self-surrender to God.

One day, under the influence of drink, he abused the Master in such shocking language that the other devotees were about to punish him, but the Master himself held them

back. He kept quiet, knowing that at heart Girish was tender and sincere. Meanwhile Girish himself did not feel remorse until others had made him understand what he had done. One of the devotees remarked to the Master: "After all, what Girish has is only poison; what else could he give you?" He was urged not to visit Girish any more. But his characteristic reply was: "Just hear his words! Get me a coach. I shall go to Girish's house today." And, heedless of the midday sun, he went to see Girish. Finding him full of anguish and remorse, he comforted him, saying: "Girish, don't worry about it; people will be astonished at the marvellous change that will come over you." And so it happened.

The illumined souls are never moved by personal honour or insult; they shower their compassion and grace on all who need it even if they are the worst sinners.

Sri Sarada Devi

Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was the embodiment of purity. As a girl, she used to pray: "O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind."[15] After the Master's passing away, by virtue of her own spiritual illumination, she became a great spiritual teacher, bringing light and peace to many.

Her great Mother's heart knew no bounds. When some one protested against her blessing a young man gone astray, she said bluntly: "If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?"[16]

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15. *Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 52.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

A lady devotee once complained to her: "Mother, you cannot see the defects of others." The Mother replied: "There is no lack of people to see the faults of others. The world will not come to a standstill if I am otherwise." Her last message, as it were, to all who have ears to hear was: "If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. This whole world is your own."[17]

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda, the greatest of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, made it the mission of his life to instil into humanity, by word and deed, the ideal of the service of God in man. "First, let us be God, and then help others to be Gods," was his message and motto. His mighty heart bleeding for the poor, the down-trodden and the suffering, made him declare:

> "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls,—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship."[18]

Speaking of the illumined man, himself being such a one, he said:

> "He works only to do good; his lips speak only benediction to all; his hands do only good work; his mind can only think good thoughts; his presence is a blessing wher-

17. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

18. *The Complete Works of Swami Vjvekananda*, Vol. V, p. 106

ever he goes. He is himself a living blessing. Such a man will, by his very presence, change even the most wicked persons into saints. Even if he does not speak, his very presence is a blessing to mankind."[19]

These illumined souls belong to all humanity. They cut across all divisions of race, religion, sex or caste. Having attained the Divine, they have become the Divine, and as such one with all souls. During our moral and spiritual struggles, during our periods of doubts and darkness, let us remember them, and find new strength, hope and light. May they bless us all. May we follow in their footsteps, and become, in our own humble way, a blessing to ourselves and a blessing to our fellow-beings.

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19. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 284.

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GLOSSARY

Abhedananda, Swami (1866-1939):
A great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He preached Vedanta for a quarter of a century in America.

Adbhutananda, Swami (Latu) (-d. 1920):
Another great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna—an absolutely illiterate house-boy who, through contact with and the grace of the Master, attained the highest wisdom. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Latu is the greatest miracle of Sri Ramakrishna."

Adler, Alfred (1876-1939):
Austrian physician and psychiatrist. Originally a student of Sigmund Freud, from whom he seceded and founded the School of Individual Psychology.

Ahriman:
The personified principle of Evil in the Zoroastrian religion as opposed to Ahura Mazda, who is the Supreme God and the principle of Good.

Ahura Mazda:
(See above).

Akbar (1542-1605):
The liberal-minded Moghul emperor of India who strove to bring about a harmony of religions.

Angela da Foligno (1248-1302):
Hermit of the Franciscan Order. Having reached a high state of spiritual culture in Italian mysticism, she exerted a tremendous influence on later-day mystics.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.):
Famous Greek philosopher, logician and metaphysician. He was the disciple of Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great.

Asoka (-d. 232 B.C.):
The great Mauryan emperor of India who embraced Buddhism and was responsible for spreading it far and wide. By his piety he came to be considered as "Tne beloved of gods and men."

Atman:
The Self. It may also denote the individual soul which is, in its essential nature, nothing but the Supreme Spirit.

Augustine, St., of Hippo (354-430):
Great theologian of the Christian Church. His famous works: '*The Confession*' and '*The City of God*'. His oft-quoted utterance: 'Our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee'.

Bayazid (800-877):
Great Sufi mystic who said, "I am alive in Him."

Beecher, Lyman (1775-1863):
American congregational preacher, clergyman and revivalist. He and others of his school held that man's responsibility rests on the freedom to choose and to do.

Bhagavad-Gita (Gita):
The scripture par excellence of Hinduism. A part of the great epic "Mahabharata". It is the message of Sri Krishna, wherein is propounded the harmony of the paths of action, devotion and knowledge, leading to the highest spiritual realisation.

Bose, Sir J. C. (1858-1937):
Reputed Indian physicist and biologist. Founder of the Bose Institute in Calcutta. Published many works on plant physiology. Designed most sensitive instruments for magnifying tiny movements.

Brahman:
The Infinite, Absolute, Supreme Reality of the Vedanta philosophy.

Brahmananda, Swami (Rakhal) (1863-1922):

A foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, regarded as his spiritual son. Succeeded Swami Vivekananda as the leader of the Ramakrishna Movement. A great repository of spiritual knowledge and power.

Buddha, Gautama (566-486 B.C.):

The founder of the rational agnostic religion which arose out of ancient Hinduism and came to be named after him. Son of a chieftain of the warrior caste living on the Nepalese border, young Gautama renounced the world, practised profound meditation, attained Bodha or illumination and came to be known as the Buddha, the enlightened. His religion spread in many lands including Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, China and other countries in East Asia, and influenced the life and thought of more than half of the human race. The "Tripitakas" form his collected teachings.

Christ, Jesus (4 B.C.-29 or 30 A.D.):

The founder of Christianity, the religion named after him. Regarded by his followers as the incarnate Son of God. The word 'Christ' means the anointed. Born in Palestine, the land of the Jews. As a result of deep communion with the Divine Spirit, he preached the love of God and love of man. One of the great prophets of the world who have spiritually influenced millions. His teachings are embodied in the form Gospels, commonly known as the New Testament of the Bible.

Chaitanya, Krishna (1485-1533):

Great mystic of Bengal who preached divine love. Founder of the Bengal School of Vaishnavism and considered by his followers as a divine incarnation.

Confucius (551-479 B.C.):

The Chinese philosopher who gave China its vital ethical teachings. These have influence over the vast majority of the country's people including those who follow Buddhism and Taoism.

Dionysius, the Areopagite:

An unknown author bearing the name of the judge who was converted on the Areopagus—the seat of the ancient Athenian criminal court — by St. Paul. Later researches have revealed the writer to be a devout Neo-Platonic Christian whose remarkable works have influenced Christian mysticism more than any others from 500 A.D. to 1500 A.D.

Eckhart, Meister (1260-1327):

Monk of the Dominican Order, regarded as the "Father of German mysticism." From his deep spiritual experience he spoke in terms of monism and the mysteries of Godhead compared to which, "all creatures are nothingness." His thoughts have a great kinship with the monism of the Advaita Vedanta. He ably defended himself against the charge of heresy.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1803-1882):

Celebrated American essayist and thinker. The chief exponent of New England Transcendentalism.

Fox, George (1624-1691):

English preacher and founder of the Society of Friends, otherwise known as the Quakers. The movement had its origin in his mystic experience of "an infinite ocean of light and love which flowered over the ocean of darkness." Recognising the "inner light" in man, the Quakers eschewed violence and took up the ideal of service.

Francis, St., of Assissi (1182-1226):

Founder of the famous monastic Order named after him. Formerly a pleasure seeking young man he became transformed into a great saint, embodying in his life the ideals of absolute poverty, infinite love for all beings—human and subhuman—and unbounded joy.

Freud, Sigmund (1856-1939):

Founder of the Psycho-analytic school. Professor of Neurology in Vienna University. His contributions in the field of psychology are vast and varied.

Ghosh, Girish Chandra (1844-1912):

Famous actor-dramatist of Bengal, regarded as the father of the modern Bengali stage. Formerly led a life of moral degradation but was totally transformed by Sr Ramakrishna.

Guyon, Madame (1648-1717):

French mystic belonging to the Quietist movement of the 17th century which stressed absolute self-surrender as a pre-requisite to receiving divine grace. She was condemned and even imprisoned by the Church of Rome. A prolific writer.

Ibrahim, Ibn Adham (c. 8th Century A.D.):

One of the early Sufi mystics. A king of ancient Bactria, a province of Persia. Renouncing the world, he practised hardest austerities and attained Supreme Divine union through love of God. "I purchased renunciation in exchange for a kingdom."

Ingersoll, Robert Green (1833-1899):

Renowned American lawyer and a powerful agnostic lecturer.

James, William (1842-1910):

Great American psychologist and philosopher. His monumental contribution to religion is his "The Varieties of Religious Experience."

Jefferson, Thomas (1743-1826):

Third President of the U.S.A. Took part in the American revolution and drafted the Declaration of Independence.

Jehova:

The name of the personal God of the Jews, whose message was revealed to the prophets of Israel.

John, St., of the Cross (1542-1591):

Spanish Carmelite mystic, representing Spanish mysticism at its best. Regarded by some as the greatest interpreter of mystical theology. His "Dark Night of the Soul" and "Ascent of Mount Carmel" have high place in Christian mystical literature.

Judaism:
The pure monotheistic religion of the ancient Jews.

Jung, Carl Gustav (1875-1961):
Famous Swiss psychiatrist. A former pupil of Sigmund Freud, with whom he disagreed on many fundamental psychological issues and founded his own School of Analytical Psychology.

Kaba:
The inner shrine of the great mosque at Mecca, which contains in its south-western corner the famous sacred "black stone"—the object of special veneration for Muslims.

Kabir (1440-1518):
Great saint of medieval India who made an earnest effort to foster a spirit of harmony between Hinduism and Islam. Said to be the son of a Muslim weaver of Banaras, he became the disciple of Saint Ramananda. Realising the one Godhead that is called by different names by various people, he declared: "There is one Father of Hindu and Mussalman, one God in all matter. He is the Lord of all the earth, my guardian, my priest."

Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804):
Renowned German philosopher. In his revolutionary theory of knowledge, he said that all experiences are limited and coloured by the categories of time, space and causation.

Kapila:
Founder of the Sankhya school of ancient Indian philosophy which can be said to be dualistic. It believes in two ultimate realities—an infinite number of souls or Purushas and one primeval material principle or Prakriti. Prakriti is the mother of the ego, mind, senses and matter—gross or subtle—including the body with which the soul identifies itself. Emancipation is attained through discriminative knowledge bringing about the separation of the soul from all forms of matter, gross or subtle, which cause various kinds of misery (duhkha) to the soul.

Krishna:

The Divine Incarnation par excellence of the Hindus. The hero of various Hindu scriptures including the epic Mahabharata, he is the celebrated preacher of the "Bhagavad-Gita", the Lord's Song.
(See under "Bhagavad-Gita")

Lao Tse (c. 570 B.C.):

The great Chinese mystic and author of Tao Ten Ching, which embodies his profound mysticism with its emphasis on the unity of all world and human phenomena, and the rhythm of life to be lived in harmony with the original simple human nature.

"M" (Mahendra Nath Gupta) (1854-1932):

Eminent householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who chose to be known only under this humble pseudonym. He was the head of a Calcutta high school when he met the Master in 1882. Since then he noted the talks of Sri Ramakrishna till 1886 when the latter passed away. The result was "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", a book unique in the religious literature of the world. Says Aldous Huxley of this work: "Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail."

Mahabharata:

The most voluminous of the epics of the world. It is a combination of genuine epic with general ethics, religion and a compendium of Hindu polity.

Maitreyi:

Wife of the illumined sage Yajnavalkya of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. A remarkable woman of ancient India devoted to the pursuit of the Highest Reality.

Mithraism:

A mystery religion based on the worship of Mithra—the God of light who dispels the powers of darkness. It originated in Persia and became popular in the Roman Empire before and during the introduction of Christianity, which supplanted it but at the same time was also considerably influenced by it.

Mystic:

Term denoting a person who unravels the mystery of the Supreme Reality by direct intuitive knowledge and attains union with either all or some of Its aspects—immanent or transcendent—and experiences It in his own self, in all souls and in the universe.

Mysticism:

The path following which the mystic attains, through intuitive experience, the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God. According to all spiritual paths, the four stages in the mystic way are: (1) Spiritual awakening, (2) purification, (3) illumination and (4) unification. (See Mystic)

Nag, Durga Charan (1846-1899):

A great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whose love and devotion to the Master were unparalleled. He lived as a householder but led an exemplary life of absolute purity and self-sacrifice.

Nanak (1469-1538):

Founder of Sikhism. Born near Lahore. Like Kabir he preached the unity of Godhead. Stressed the essentials of religion more than the rituals. "They are not to be called pure who only wash their bodies; rather they are pure who enshrine the Lord in their hearts."

Narada:

Great lover of God and preacher of divine love in Hindu lore. Among many works ascribed to him is the well-known "Bhakti Sutras" or the Aphorisms of Divine Love. In the Upanishads we find him as a seeker of liberation and a student of the great sage Sanatkumara.

Neo-platonism:

A blend of many systems of philosophic thought. It is believed by some scholars to be a combination of the thought

of Plato and other Greek philosophers with that of ancient Indian philosophers. Plotinus was the greatest exponent of this mystico-philosophical school.

Philo, Judaeus (30 B.C.-50 A.D.):
Jewish Hellenistic philosopher in Alexandria, who tried to unite Greek and Jewish philosophies.

Plato (427-347 B.C.):
The renowned Greek philosopher, who was the pupil of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle. He declared that the visible world of sense is illusive and obscures the real world which lies open to thought alone. According to him, the aim of life is knowledge of truth and control of the individual and society by reason. The highest idea is that of the Good and all other ideas are subordinated to it. Good is the God of Plato.

Plotinus (205-270):
Non-Christian mystic-philosopher of the first order who influenced Christian theology and mysticism greatly. Born near Alexandria.
(See Neo-platonism)

Porphyry (232-304):
The most distinguished of the pupils of Plotinus. Published the writings of the teacher with an account of his life. According to his own testimony, he was once united with the Godhead at the age of seventy-eight, while Plotinus had attained the state four times in his life.

Premananda, Swami (Baburam) (1861-1918):
One of the greatest disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. An embodiment of a rare type of purity and divine love.

Rabbia (717-801):
An eminent woman saint of Sufism or mystical Islam.

Rama:
Popular Divine Incarnation of the Hindus. The hero of the epic Ramayana.

Ramakrishna, Sri (1836-1886):

A unique spiritual seeker of India who followed the various Hindu spiritual paths as also those of Islam and Christianity and declared that he had reached the same goal of Divine Consciousness. The most outstanding religious teacher of the age and regarded by his followers as an incarnation of God, he taught that all religious paths lead to God.

Ramanuja (1017-1137):

Philosopher-saint of the qualified non-dualistic school of Vedanta, known as Visishtadvaita. He held that the individual souls and the universe constitute the body of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit. He lived an intense life of devotion to the Lord and advocated it as a means of the soul's emancipation from all bonds.

Raphael (1483-1520):

The great Italian painter, sculptor and architect whose paintings excel others in their beauty of expression and inspiring treatment.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173):

Eminent Scottish monk and theologian belonging to the mystic school. Lived in the Abbey of St. Victor on the outskirts of Paris. He has influenced the later mystics greatly.

Sankara (788-820):

One of the greatest philosopher-mystics of India and the exponent of the Advaita or non-dualistic Vedanta. He was the dynamic force in the Hindu revival following the downfall of Buddhism in India.

Sanatkumara:

One of the four mental offspring of Brahma the Creator, according to Hindu mythology. Like his three other brothers, he also refused to lead a worldly life, and chose a life of extreme renunciation and illumination.

Sarada Devi (1853-1920):

Spiritual Consort of Sri Ramakrishna. After the passing away of the Master, she became a great spiritual teacher, highly revered for her saintliness, and was addressed by her vast number of disciples as "The Holy Mother."

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1778-1860):

German philosopher who was greatly drawn towards the teachings of the Upanishads.

Shaw, George Bernard (1856-1950):

Great Irish playwright and critic, famous for his poignant wit and exposure of social hypocrisy. Nobel Laureate.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.):

The celebrated Greek philosopher who held that "Virtue is knowledge." When sentenced to death on political grounds, he died a most glorious death, firm in his belief of the immortality of the soul. His famous "Socratic method" is a process of discovering truth by means of suitable questions and answers.

Sophists:

Popular teachers of philosophy in ancient Greece, who travelled about the country for the spread of culture as they understood it, sometimes even preaching contradictory doctrines. Protagoras is considered to be the chief amongst them, his most famous formula being "Man is the measure of all things."

Sufism:

System of Islamic mysticism, somewhat akin to Advaita Vedanta, which prevailed chiefly in Persia. Divine love is its central theme.

Tagore, Devendranath (1817-1905):

Great leader of the Brahmo Samaj, who came to be called "Maharshi", the great saint, because of his spiritual attainments.

Tao;

Chinese name for the Supreme Spirit and also the inner law governing the universe.

T(h)eresa, St, of Avila (1515-1582):

Spanish Carmelite Abbess and reformer. Famous for her ascetic life and mystic visions. Her writings—"The Way of Perfection" and "The Interior Castle" reveal the depth of her mystical experiences and her rare genius as a psychologist describing the unfoldment of spiritual consciousness.

Tolstoy, Count Leo (1828-1910):

Russian author, philosopher and social reformer. Wild and Bohemian in his younger days, he became transformed and later in life developed a kind of religious mysticism.

Turiyananda, Swami (1863-1922):

One of the greatest of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, regarded by the Master as a Yogi of the type described in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Upanishads;

The basic teachings of the ancient seers of India, characterised by their search after the Ultimate Reality, culminating in the realisation of the One without a second, which transcends the relationship between the knower and the known, the individual and the universal.

Vedanta;

The most important of the six systems of the orthodox Hindu philosophy, which in course of time has assimilated the other systems and become all-comprehensive.

Vivekananda, Swami (Narendranath) (1863-1902):

The greatest of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Disseminated the ideas of the Master both in India and the West. Organized the religious and philanthropic movement known as the "Ramakrishna Mission" in the East and "Vedanta Society" in the West. Represented Hinduism at the Parlia-

ment of Religions held in 1893 at the Chicago World Fair; and brought a new prestige to the religious culture of India. A great organizer, orator and accredited author. His works are compiled and published in eight volumes under the title "The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda".

Vyasa:

The traditional author of the Mahabharata. Many other works are also ascribed to him. A great sage of ancient India, who classified the Vedas or the basic scriptures of Hinduism.

Yajnavalkya:

Reputed seer of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. He declared—"The Self is to be realised by hearing of It, by reflecting on It, and by meditating on It."

Yoga:

As the goal, it means union of the individual soul with the Universal Spirit. As a path, it is the means to self-realisation. It also means a particular system of philosophy leading to the cessation of all thought-waves and the attainment of the knowledge of the pure spirit.

Zoroaster:

Great reformer of the ancient religion of Iran or Persia. Converted his people from a primitive worship of many gods to a most ardent ethical monotheistic faith. Believed to have lived in the 8th century B.C.

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